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PLUCK AND LUCK

THE BOY SLAVES OF SIBERIA OR THE VULTURE KING

AND OTHER STORIES

By Berton Bertrew



A monster black bear reared upon his hind legs. Seizing Argegoff with his forepaws, he tore him from Malatka's breast. Encircling him in his deadly embrace, he gave him a terrible hug.

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Stories of Adventure

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The Boy Slaves of Siberia

OR,

THE VULTURE KING

By BERTON BERTREW

CHAPTER I.

THE VULTURE KING.

A gloomy day in the month of February of the year 1880 was drawing to a close. The sky, which had been overcast since dawn grew still more somber with the approach of night-fall, and from the dull, leaden dome of the cheerless heavens the snow began to fall in fine, soft flakes upon the whitened surface of the earth below.

Toiling through the storm up the steep ascent of a rugged pass in the Baikal Mountains in the dread land of snow and death—Siberia—was a man of athletic stature, clad in the wild and picturesque garb of a Burait hunter.

It was evident from the silvery whiteness of the scattering locks of his hair which strayed from under the close-fitting cap, and from the deep lines and furrows upon his weather-beaten face, that he was well advanced in years, and yet he still retained much of the vigor of early manhood.

Reared among the mountains of the Baikal range, in the northeastern portion of Siberia, in the neighborhood of Lake Baikal, he had from boyhood been inured to every hardship of the mountaineer's perilous life.

Several years of his early manhood had been spent in the service of the Czar, and he had acted as guide for the convoys of prisoners so frequently sent from Russia proper into exile in the terrible mines of Siberia. Thus his knowledge of Siberia was not confined to the region of the Baikals, but extended throughout Siberia, and indeed to Russia itself. He was a full-bred Burait-Cossack, and his father had been the leader or chief of a band of those half-civilized mountain robbers who were the terror of caravans and travelers who were obliged to cross the Baikals.

Even now, with one blast of the strange-shaped horn which hung at his girdle, the aged Burait could call together a horde of fierce, half-civilized mountain robbers.

The name of this aged man of the mountains, whom we are introducing to the reader at some length, was Nivandroff Kalatka, but he was commonly known throughout Siberia as "The Vulture King of the Baikals," and well he deserved this strange title, as the progress of our story will prove.

Kalatka had married at the age of thirty, and one child, a son, had blessed his union with the fair Siberian girl who had won his love. The wife of his youth had long since died, and the son had gone to St. Petersburg to seek his fortune. For a long, long time Kalatka had dwelt entirely alone in a log hut of his own construction in the fastness of the densely wooded mountains.

After the death of his wife he had retired in a great measure from the society of his former companions.

He continued his way through the snow storm along the pass, and after traversing a distance of not more than a single verst, he reached a sheltered glade, in which stood a log cabin.

As Kalatka came in sight of his cabin, a huge Siberian bloodhound, as large as a donkey, came frisking down the path to meet him, barking joyously and giving every evidence of pleasure in canine actions and language.

"Down, Don! Good boy," said Kalatka, patting the head of the huge bloodhound as he leaped upon him, planting his huge paws upon the hunter's breast and striving to lick his master's face. The intelligent brute obeyed, and trotted along in advance of the mountaineer toward the door of the hut.

"The birds are clamoring for food. It is past feeding-time, and I must give them supper at once," muttered the Siberian as he reached his cabin door and, pushing it open, entered the hut.

The room in which he found himself was hung with furs and was very warm and comfortable. Several spears stood in a corner, a cross-bow and a quiver filled with arrows hung upon the wall. A short, heavy carbine, hunting-knives and other implements of the hunter's calling, such as traps, a net for taking fish from the mountain streams, and a sort of alpen-stock for leaping across chasms, were scattered about. In one corner was what seemed to be a huge bundle of black fur.

The most strange and striking feature of the apartment was, however, yet to be mentioned. Across the rear of the room, separating it from a second apartment even larger than the first, was a row of small, round iron bars extending from floor to ceiling, causing this end of the hut to look like the front of a cage, and such it was.

Within this cage were a score of huge, fierce Asiatic vultures, and as Kalatka entered the room in front of it they flew and rushed against the bars, thrusting their long necks between them, snapping their cruel, sharp beaks and uttering the discordant shrieks which had greeted Kalatka's approach to the cabin.

"Hush! hush! my children!" cried the Vulture King, approaching and striking upon the bars of the cage with his lance. Directly the vultures became silent. It was evident they feared their keeper.

Kalatka now raised a small trap in the floor, and producing a quantity of meat cut in strips, he flung it into the vultures' cage.

The ugly birds fought and snarled as they devoured it, and turning away, Kalatka proceeded to prepare his own evening meal.

While he was thus engaged, "Don," the bloodhound, suddenly uttered a deep, low growl, and sprang towards the door. Kalatka had heard nothing, yet he knew that the dog, with keener senses, had detected the proximity of some strange beast, or, perchance of some human creature.

Almost immediately there came a rap at the door of the hut. Kalatka fearlessly opened it, though before doing so he loosened the hunting-knife in his girdle so that it was ready for use, should the occasion demand it.

The moment the door opened a short, thick-set man, attired like Kalatka, in the fur garb of the mountains, entered.

"What you want here, Argegoff?" asked Kalatka.

"I bring you news," was the answer, and Argegoff's little black, bead-like eyes snapped with malicious pleasure.

"'Tis ill-news, then, or you would not bring it."

"Know then, Nivandroff Kalatka, that your son Morva has been convicted of complicity in a plot to assassinate the Czar, Alexander the Second, the great father of Russia, and that he has been doomed to exile for life in the quicksilver mines of Siberia. Yes, doomed to a living death, from which there is no escape. Your son is a traitor and a would-be murderer!"

"You lie, vile wretch! My son may have been doomed to Siberia for some other cause, but for plotting the death of the emperor—never! He was a spirited boy always, and a love of liberty was strong in his heart; and he may have spoken his mind too freely, but a murderer at heart, never! Wretch, leave me ere I strangle you for the miserable cur that you are!" cried Kalatka, passionately, as with clenched hands and trembling with rage he struggled to restrain himself.

"You speak as though you were my master; we are here alone. I defy you, and I'll fight you to the death, or I'll cut your ears off and proclaim you a coward if you refuse!" shrieked Argegoff, mad with hate, and drawing a long knife.

"You are a young and vigorous man. The odds are all in your favor, but I will fight you as you wish, and it shall be a duel to the death," answered Kalatka, sternly.

The next moment steel clashed against steel, and the battle with knives had begun.

The men fought desperately, but Argegoff pressed the Vulture King steadily back.

The youthful agility of Argegoff was proving too much for the brave old Vulture King.

Argegoff made a quick and desperate thrust at his adversary's throat, and in dodging backward to avoid the stroke which he partially parried with his own blade, Kalatka's foot slipped and he fell.

Suddenly the seeming bundle of black fur, which we mentioned in describing the contents of the hut, was animated with life, and a monster black bear reared up upon his hind-legs, and seizing Argegoff with his forepaws and encircling him in his deadly embrace, he gave him a terrible hug, which almost crushed the life from his body.

Kalatka staggered to his feet.

At the same moment there came to his ears the shrill blast of a Baikal horn.

"'Tis Valmer, the guide, and he comes from St. Petersburg; now I shall know the truth!" cried Kalatka, and opening the door of the hut he blew an answering blast upon the horn which he wore suspended at his belt.

CHAPTER II.

VALMER, THE TARTAR GUIDE.

"For the love of heaven, release me! The brute is crushing all the bones in my body!" groaned Argegoff, as soon as he could speak, and vainly striving to free himself from the embrace of the bear.

"I will spare your life, miserable man, for I do not care to have your blood upon my hands, much as you deserve to die," said Kalatka.

"Release him, Bruno. Release him, I say."

The bear seemed loath to relinquish his victim, but when Kalatka stamped his foot and repeated his command, the well-trained animal at length relaxed his hold, and Argegoff tore himself from his embrace.

"Now go, base man, and never return here again, or you may not get off so easily," said Kalatka, sternly.

Without a word, the crestfallen villain slunk from the hut, but ere he vanished in the snow storm he turned and shook his fist menacingly at the habitation of him he so bitterly hated, and muttered an imprecation upon all under that roof.

The deadly foe of the Vulture King had hardly disappeared from sight down the mountain trail when there came a second shrill blast from a Baikal horn, but this time near at hand, and a moment later a handsome man of commanding presence, attired in the garb of a Tartar scout—a full suit of deer-skin and heavy overcoat and tall fur hat—came striding up the pass.

This man was Valmer, the Tartar guide, of whom Kalatka had remarked: "He comes from St. Petersburg." This was indeed true. Valmer and his band had been employed to guide and protect a caravan from the Chinese frontier to St. Petersburg, and he had just returned.

Kalatka advanced to meet Valmer, for they were old friends, tried and true. Kalatka and the Tartar had hunted together in times gone by, and the Vulture King had saved the other's life when he was in the power of a fierce band of Baikal robbers.

The two men greeted each other warmly.

"Sasha!" exclaimed Valmer. "The storm is terrible, but I determined to reach you to-night, my brother. Did I not pass Argegoff, the hunter, on my way up? A man hurried by me in the pass as though he did not care to be recognized, yet I thought it was he."

They entered the hut and Kalatka stirred the fire up on the hearth into a cheerful blaze, as he answered:

"You were not mistaken. It was Argegoff, and he came to bring terrible news of Morva. You can tell me the truth; speak, I implore you, for my heart is anxious."

"The wretch, then, has been before me. He has made the matter worse than it is, though it is bad enough, my brother. Morva is a Nihilist. It seems he has for some time been a member of a secret order of freedom-loving young Russians in St. Petersburg. A spy penetrated the order and betrayed its members, and Morva has been doomed to the penal settlement of Siberia for life."

"My poor Morva doomed to a fate worse than death. Oh, Valmer! is there no hope?" he cried, in anguish.

"Kalatka—brother, know you not it is treason to speak even of resisting the will of the Czar?"

"Yes, but I am an old man. He is my only child—the apple of my eye, the heart of my bosom. I would die for him freely. I must, I will save him, or I'll die with him."

"A man who knows every trail and pass, a man who can call around him the fierce huntsman of the Baikals, and who rules the birds of the air and tames the wild beasts of the forest, might do much. There are many long and weary versts between St. Petersburg and Tobolsk, and between Tobolsk and the mines of Tomsk, Timsk and Gigansk, to say nothing of the other more distant stations.

"You know, my brother, at Tobolsk the convoys of prisoners always halt, and from there the prisoners are distributed to the various destinations to which they have been assigned. Melnikoff is the real ruler of their destinies. The chief of the Third Section is the power that fixes the location of their place of exile, although the form of sentencing is in some cases gone through with by the governor-general. Now, although the deed would be attended with great risk, it is possible for a brave, determined hand to snatch Morva from the clutches of the tyrant while the convoy to which he has been assigned is on the march," said Valmer.

"Then it shall be done!" cried Kalatka.

"You are fully determined to undertake the rescue?"

"I am, and I shall need the help of a few brave, true men."

"Yes, my brother, and no time shall be lost."

"How shall I find the convoy to which my boy belongs? How shall I learn the route they are taking, or at what point they now are?"

"When the sun rises upon the morrow, if the snow has ceased to fall and the air is clear, I will tell you, as I expect a spy to report here to me what progress the convoy is making."

"You are a friend indeed to Morva."

"I am more than a friend."

Valmer bent forward and whispered in the other's ear: "I am a Nihilist!"

Quick as thought, Kalatka extended his hand to his friend. Valmer grasped it, and as he felt the pressure of Kalatka's grip he started up, filled with surprise.

"You, too!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," answered Kalatka, "I, too, am a Nihilist!"

* * * * *

The following day dawned bright and clear. The snow had ceased falling, and the sky was cloudless.

The vultures had become ravenous for their morning meal, and they had set up their unearthly din, so Kalatka proceeded to feed them.

There was now nothing to do but to await the coming of Valmer's spy, and to amuse his friend, Kalatka made the tame bear perform many amusing tricks.

"Bruno was greatly attached to Morva, and the intelligent beast may be of service to us in effecting his rescue," remarked the Vulture King, when Bruno had exhausted his store of accomplishments as a performer.

"The vultures, are trained wonderfully, I have heard, and it is because of your skill in training them that you are called the Vulture King. What can the ugly birds do?" asked Val-

mer, gazing curiously at the vultures in the huge cage at the rear of the room.

"They are trained to follow me, and to attract other birds or animals at my command, and they would fall upon a man as fiercely as upon a bird were I to order it. Dangerous assailants they would be, too, with their sharp beaks and powerful tearing claws. My flock would put a score of men to flight were they to set upon them suddenly. Then some of the vultures are trained to carry messages, and they are as faithful as the carrier-pigeon."

The day wore slowly away. Long seemed the hour to the anxious father and his devoted friend, for they were longing to be up and doing something for the imperiled one. Just at nightfall their straining eyes discerned a travel-stained man dragging himself wearily up the mountain trail.

"Ha! He comes at last. It is Ivan, the scout," cried Valmer, rushing forward to meet him.

The spy was exhausted, and, supported by Valmer, he sank down at the door of the Vulture King's hut. Kalatka hastened to give him a drink of kivass, which he drank eagerly. The fiery drink refreshed him, and in a few hurried sentences he told all that the friends of Morva, the young exile, wished to know. He gave the number of gendarmes who guarded the convoy of the exiles, the route they were following, and the probable point they would reach by the next morning.

"To-morrow night we must be at the camping-place of the exiles," said Kalatka.

"To-morrow night!" echoed Valmer.

Then they all turned in for the night, that they might be refreshed for the morrow's journey.

CHAPTER III.

THE START FOR SIBERIA.

A few days previous to the occurrence of the incident related in the two preceding chapters, two youths or young men, for they were aged respectively eighteen and twenty years, were traversing an obscure street in the city of St. Petersburg.

"There are several new members to join the order to-night, Morva, and the weekly reports from the lodges in the provinces are to be read. I doubt not that the meeting will be of unusual interest. The order of 'The Sons of Russian Liberty' is growing stronger day by day, and the time is not far distant when even the Czar will know and feel its power."

The speaker was the elder of the youths, and there was an air of culture and refinement in his appearance, as well as in the modulation of his voice and the method of expression which told that he belonged to the higher walks of society.

"Yes, brother Salus Vorviski, the despot shall yet listen to the prayers of the oppressed people of Russia," answered the younger of the lads, warmly.

As the reader has recognized his name, it is hardly necessary to say that the speaker is Morva Kalatka, the son of the Vulture King of the Baikals.

They continued their nocturnal walk for a long way, and finally, when the suburbs of the city were reached, they paused before a dilapidated stone church, which seemed to have been long since abandoned as a place of worship, for the roof had partially fallen in, the windows were shattered, and the walls overgrown with moss and wild vines.

Advancing to the door, which had evidently been but recently repaired, Morva gave a peculiar knock. Almost at once a small wicket in the door on a level with the lad's face was slid open, and a pair of sharp, black eyes gave the lads a searching glance.

The scrutiny was satisfactory, and directly the door opened and our young friends passed into a small entry and found themselves confronted by a second door. Here they were compelled to make answer to several passwords, after which ceremonially they entered a long, narrow room without windows, in which some fifty young men were assembled.

They were now in the "lodge" of "The Sons of Russian Liberty," a youthful branch of the Nihilists' league of Russia.

Among the several candidates who had presented themselves for membership, and who took the terrible oath which bound the league members, was a dark, gypsy-looking youth, who answered to the name of Michael Gantsk.

This lad attracted the attention of both Morva Kalatka and Salus Vorviski by the way in which he watched them from out the corners of his sharp eyes.

When the meeting of the young Nihilists was over, and as Morva and his friend were on their way homeward, at the corner of a street they were suddenly confronted by a dozen men in the attire of the police.

"They are our birds. Bring them along!" commanded a man who was the only one in plain clothes, and whom our young friends knew must be an emissary of the Third Section.

Resistance was worse than useless, and the lads were seized and thrust into a covered tumbril on runners which stood near at hand. A couple of gendarmes got into the covered sleigh with them, the man in plain clothing mounted upon the box with the driver, and the vehicle was driven rapidly away.

The young Nihilists were in the power of the wolves of Russia—the secret police of the Czar.

The boys spoke never a word, but by a pressure of the hand they assured each other of their mutual devotion. Soon the sleigh passed.

"Get out, my young hawks!" commanded the gendarmes.

The boys obeyed. One of the gendarmes grasped each by the shoulder with an iron grip, as though fearing they would attempt to escape them.

It was a starlight night, and the young prisoners saw that the sleigh had stopped before a grim and massive stone structure. They were led up a short flight of stone steps, and after waiting for a few moments in the ante-chamber, a massive door, before which stood an armed gendarme on guard, was opened and they found themselves in a large room, brilliantly illuminated by a chandelier suspended from the center of the ceiling.

In the center of the floor stood a desk, and behind it sat a stern-faced man, past middle age, who peered at them over a pair of heavy silver spectacles.

The boy Nihilists had both seen the man before, and they recognized him at once, for General Mellikoff's was a face, once seen, not easily to be forgotten.

"Whom have we here?" demanded Mellikoff, sternly.

"Salus Vorviski and Morva Kalatka," answered the men in plain clothes, who had ordered the boys' arrest.

"The charge?" demanded Mellikoff, laconically.

"They are Nihilists, plotting the death of the Czar."

"The proof?" was the stern, immovable man's next words.

"They are here. Michael Gantsk, speak."

At the mention of that name both the young prisoners started. The gypsy-looking lad who had that very night joined the order of the Sons of Russian Liberty stepped from behind a curtain in the rear of the room.

"I penetrated the order of Nihilists to which both these youths belong; I saw them there; I heard them speak treason, and if you search the tall one, Salus Vorviski, you will find treasonable documents in his possession," said Gantsk.

"Search the accused," ordered Mellikoff. His order was promptly obeyed, and hidden in Salus' fur-topped boot was found a report from a branch of the order of Nihilists in another city, and a copy of an enthusiastic letter from a prominent Nihilist who had fled to a land of liberty beyond the sea.

Mellikoff read both documents carefully, and locked them up in his desk before he spoke. At last he bent his piercing eyes upon the two lads and showing his teeth with a cruel, malicious smile, he said, in his cold, steely voice, which sent a shiver down the boys' spines:

"Salus Vorviski, the proof is enough; you and your companion start for Siberia before the sun rises!"

As he spoke he touched a bell upon the desk at his side.

A gendarme answered it.

"Conduct the prisoners to the fortress. The convoy will start in three hours for Siberia," said the iron chief of police.

As the youthful prisoners were being led to the covered sleigh which had brought them to the palace, a man of commanding presence came hurrying by. Morva recognized him, and acting upon the impulse of the moment, he called:

"Valmer! Valmer!"

The next instant one of the gendarmes placed his hand over the lad's mouth and, with a muttered imprecation, hurled him into the sleigh into which Salus had already been thrust, and the doomed ones were driven away at a rapid pace.

The man to whom Morva had called half turned at the sound of the lad's voice and seemed about to greet him, and then, as if suddenly recollecting himself, he turned and walked slowly on. He was Valmer, the Tartar guide, to whom the reader has been introduced in the preceding chapter.

The sleigh containing the young Nihilists did not halt until the grim old fortress of Sts. Peter and Paul was reached, and, passing through its massive gates, the vehicle stopped within the yard, which is inclosed by a high wall.

Morva and Salus were ordered to alight, and they were

conducted into a narrow, cell-like room and the door was closed and locked upon them.

They were left alone for a few moments, and then an old man appeared and ordered them to don the clothing which he brought them. These consisted of a gray kaftan, sheep-skin bonnet and heavy, warm knee boots, with fur tops. Upon the breast of each the old attendant affixed a brass number plate. They were also each provided with a pewter mug, a mess-tin and a wooden spoon.

The old attendant who had provided them with clothing for the long and terrible journey which was before them had scarcely withdrawn when the door of their cell opened and a man entered.

"Valmer!" exclaimed Morva, rushing into his arms and embracing him after the manner of Siberians.

"Yes, little one, it is I. I heard you call when I passed the Palace of Justice, but I dared not answer you. Thanks to Viva Goomsk, the doorkeeper of the parade ground, I was enabled to get in here. Now tell me all."

Hurriedly Morva told the Tartar guide all that had occurred.

"Give me your hand," said Valmer, at the conclusion of the recital. Morva extended his hand, and Valmer gave him the grip of the secret order of Nihilists.

"You see, I am one of you, and I will help you. Within the hour I am off for Siberia."

Scarcely had Valmer gone when a gendarme thrust his head into the room through the door, which he partially opened, and gruffly said:

"Come out, you young hawks!"

Morva and Salus hastened to obey.

They passed out into the parade-ground.

The place was thronged with moving figures, and light was provided by torches bound to the ends of the Cossack prisoners' escorts' long lances.

The convoy of unfortunates was about to start for Siberia.

The exiles were chained together without regard to age or sex—refined Russian gentlemen were chained to common murderers, tender women to brutal Muscovites. The Cossack guards cracked their long whips and did not hesitate to use them or their lances upon those who caused them the slightest trouble.

At last the word was given and the exiles, over two hundred in number, attended by a strong guard of Cossacks, formed into line.

The great gates in the wall opened, and the journey to Siberia had begun.

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE MARCH TO SIBERIA.

The journey from the city of St. Petersburg to Tobolsk usually occupies from six to eight weeks, when it is to be made by a convoy of exiles.

The weary march was continued until noon-day, at which hour a short halt was made, and the exiles were served with scanty rations of salt meat and kalatch; then the journey was resumed.

Unaccustomed to travel, Salus Vorviski was becoming foot-sore and weary, but Morva, the young Siberian bear-hunter, bore the journey well, and he made his friend lean upon him, and thus assisted him.

Occasionally the gypsy spy, Michael Gantsk, would come forward and jeer at them and urge them to walk faster.

The boys would not let the gypsy lad see how much he annoyed them, for they knew that would afford him pleasure.

The Cossack escort were mounted, and as Michael Gantsk rode his huge Moscovite horse alongside of the boy exiles, he amused himself by kicking at them with his heavy boot.

The weary march over the snow-clad land of despair and death was continued, day after day. At night the convoy encamped, and the exiles threw themselves upon the ground around the camp-fires, glad of an opportunity for even a short respite from the toilsome journey.

At nightfall one snowy evening the exiles encamped at the foot of a rugged mountain range of country, which an old messenger of the convoy told the boy exiles was a favorite camping-ground for marauding bands of Tartars and robbers from the Baikals.

The snow storm increased with the coming of night, and as the boy exiles drew their blankets over their heads and curled themselves up by one of the numerous camp-fires, they were soon covered over with the soft, white flakes.

They could hear the howling of the starving wolves afar off and, although they had marched far that day, they did not fall asleep for some time after the camp became hushed and silent for the night. They were talking and thinking of escape. But they began almost to despair of receiving assistance.

Suddenly Morva Kalatka felt a hand fall upon his shoulder, and turning quickly he saw what he supposed to be the figure of Michael Gantsk bending over him. The next instant the nocturnal visitant thrust something into his hand, and before Morva recovered from his surprise he glided away.

Salus Vorviski had noted this incident, for, chained as they were together, the two lads were inseparable. Morva clutched what had been pressed into his hand, and he found it was a scrap of bleached deerskin, upon which were traced some strange characters.

The boy's face lighted with pleasure as he gazed upon it, but to Salus, who was looking over his shoulder, it was all a sealed book. He could make nothing of the odd hieroglyphics.

"At last—at last!" whispered Morva, in his companion's ear, most joyously.

"What is it? What do you mean?" asked Salus, wonderingly.

"It is a message from my father. Friends are upon our trail, and they are very near. But that Michael Gantsk should bring me the news is what troubles me. It was certainly a boy who put the deerskin into my hand, and he was of the gypsy's size, and as Gantsk is the only boy in the convoy besides ourselves it must have been him."

"Hark!" cried Salus Vorviski.

They both listened acutely.

They heard a shout from one of the Cossacks, who was doing duty on the edge of the camping-ground. It was an alarm signal, and in a moment the Cossacks were astir, and, hurriedly seizing their arms, they rushed to the spot from whence came the cry of their comrade.

Then followed the report of a gun, and a few moments later a huge black bear came tearing through the camp.

The mammoth beast made straight for the boy exiles.

CHAPTER V.

A FRIEND APPEARS.

The advent of the bear into the camp of the exiles was so abrupt, so unexpected, and so sudden that every one was for the moment stricken inactive.

While this paralytic surprise yet held all in its power, the monstrous Siberian bear came tearing—as we stated at the close of the last chapter—directly toward the boy exiles.

"My heavens, Morva, we are lost!" cried Salus Vorviski.

The bear was upon them.

The hot breath of the terrible Siberian bear struck upon Salus' face as the beast reared upon his hind legs and placed his huge paws upon Morva Kalatka's breast.

In another moment Salus expected to see his young friend perish before his eyes.

At that instant, when the bear seemed about to close upon his victim and subject him to his terrible death-hug, which would crush his bones like eggshells, the youth's face suddenly assumed an expression of glad intelligence.

Then he uttered the words:

"Bruno! Bruno!"

Instantaneously the bear began to frisk about Morva like a faithful dog rejoiced at finding his master, and occasionally he would lick his hands and face, rising upon his haunches to do so.

With a word, the lad had charmed the brute and rendered him harmless, and to the beholders it seemed like magic, but the reader has recognized the bear as Bruno, the educated bruin belonging to Morva's father—Nivendroff Kalatka—the Vulture King of the Baikal Mountains.

Morva was afraid that the gendarmes or some of the Tartar scouts might kill his beloved bear by a chance shot, and he tried to drive the bear away.

Bruno proved disobedient, and would not be sent away from the youth.

The Tartar scouts attached to the convoy were hurrying toward the bear, with their long lances ready to impale the beast.

Morva was frantic in his efforts to cause the bear to retreat, and suddenly, just as he was losing all hope of succeeding, a strange shrill and very peculiar sound, half whistle and half shriek, rang out from the depths of the neighboring forest.

Bruin pricked up his short ears and listened.

Again was the strange sound repeated.

Then, as if in obedience to the mysterious signal-call, the bear suddenly turned, and dashing through the line of Tartars, who scattered like chaff before a whirlwind, he disappeared in the snow-clad forest.

The Tartars started in pursuit.

The scene was a mystery to Salus.

"You are a wonderful boy. How did you charm the bear?" asked Salus, his face betokening by its expression the wonder which he felt.

"I did not charm him. Bruno and I are old friends. That bear belongs to my father, who captured him when he was a suckling cub, and the little bear and I grew up together in my father's hut in the Baikal Mountains. Many a time he has shared my food and drink, and I used to play with him as children do with pet dogs. The bear loves me, and nothing could induce him to harm me," answered Morva.

"How comes he here, so far away from the Baikals?"

"Why, surely, my brother, you have not forgotten the mysterious message from my father, which we received through Michael Gantsk? The presence of the bear is positive proof to my mind that the message really was from my father, and that he is near at hand."

"Here are a number of gendarmes approaching; let us feign sleep."

The boys huddled down under the cover of their blankets and became silent and motionless.

The gendarmes drew nearer.

"Yerma is a big coward," one said.

"Yes, he is," assented another.

"To wake up the whole camp and rob good men of sleep," added a third.

"And all because a bear chanced to be prowling about," continued the first speaker.

All this and more of the guards' conversation was overheard by the boys.

They were convinced that Yerma had not been deceived.

The gendarmes rolled themselves up in their furs and became silent.

The boy exiles felt no inclination for sleep. The fear that their friends might be discovered by the Tartars in pursuit of the bear was redoubled, and Morva did not now attempt to conceal from his friend his deep anxiety.

The snow had ceased falling, and now the sky was studded with a myriad of glittering stars. The air had grown piercingly cold, and the silence of the night was broken by the distant howling of the wolves.

Suddenly another sound broke the stillness of the solemn, silent night.

From afar came the report of firearms. Again and again were the reports heard.

The Cossacks, with their acutely trained senses, heard the first volley, and again the camp was astir.

The Tartar scouts who had started in pursuit of the bear had not yet returned, and Colonel Draskhi, fearing from the numerous shots fired that they had encountered some foe more formidable than that of which they were in pursuit, ordered a number of the Cossacks to follow him, and galloped away in the direction from whence the firing proceeded.

As they were leaving the camp one of the Tartar scouts arrived, and as he fell to the earth he cried:

"Forward! We are attacked by Baikal robbers! Hasten, or our brothers will all be slain!"

The Cossacks urged their horses forward at their topmost speed.

The announcement of the Tartar reached the ears of the boy exiles.

"It is as I feared," said Salus; "the Tartars have discovered our friends."

At this moment, while the attention of the entire guard was attracted to the point where the Tartar had fallen, and to the departure of Draskhi and the reinforcements intended to aid the Tartars, a stalwart man, attired in the garb of a minstrel, crawled out of the brush and snow on the other side of the camp. The man was the Vulture King.

CHAPTER VI.

THE RESCUE PARTY EN ROUTE.

Upon the morning of the day following that which marked the arrival of Ivan, Valmer's spy, the occupants of the mountain hut in the Baikals were early astir.

Nivendroff Kalatka blew many a shrill blast upon the strange-shaped horn which he wore at his girdle, and as its notes reverberated through the mountain many answering peals came back.

The Vulture King was calling together the huntsmen of his tribe.

Soon the wild, half-civilized men of the mountain began to arrive at the lonely hut of the solitary Kalatka.

Within the space of a few hours a score had assembled in answer to the signal blast upon the Baikal horn.

To these men the Vulture King imparted the object of the expedition, and they one and all acquiesced in it, and manifested a willingness, even an eagerness, to snatch from the human wolves of the Czar the prey which had fallen into their clutches.

The preparations for the march were soon made.

The vultures, in a huge but light wicker cage, were borne along with the party, upon the shoulders of four men, after the manner of the East Indian palanquins.

Bruno, the educated bear, and Don, the Siberian bloodhound, trotted along at the heels of their master.

The journey from the hut of the Vulture King to the camp of Valmer, the Tartar guide, was made on foot.

Upon the arrival of Kalatka and the Buriats a repast was served, consisting of soup, which is of a kind peculiar to the country and consisted of fish, fat and mare's milk, to which had been added a great deal of larch bark, grated fine.

Having done honor to this strange dish, Kalatka accompanied Valmer to his hut.

As the two men entered the hut a young girl of radiant beauty came forward to meet them. A single glance would have served to tell that she was not of Tartar or Buriat origin. Her features proclaimed her to be of the pure Slavonic race.

"This is Miss Mazie, a young girl who, at her earnest wish, I brought with me from St. Petersburg. She desired to follow the young companion of our Morva into exile. How is he called?" said Valmer.

"Salus," answered the maiden.

The whole party were provided with horses by the Tartar, and Mazie insisted upon accompanying the expedition which was to attempt the rescue of Salus as well as Morva Kalatka. No time was lost in getting under way.

When our party of rescue started upon horseback, the cage of the vultures was secured upon the back of one of these odd-looking little horses, which was led by a Buriat, by means of a deerskin thong attached to the bit in the bridle.

The march of the Vulture King's band was unattended with any incident of interest to the development of our story until the neighborhood in which they expected to find the exiles' convoy was reached. It was then deemed expedient to send out a trusty scout, and Valmer himself undertook this dangerous and important duty.

Mazie begged to accompany him and, unreasonable as it may seem, the guide, who could refuse her nothing, consented.

Valmer was armed with a Remington rifle, which he had purchased at a heavy cost in St. Petersburg, and besides this formidable weapon he carried a spear and hunting-knife.

For some hours Valmer and Mazie advanced, hand-in-hand, through the broken and desolate snow-covered land. Valmer entertained his companion with stories of his adventures, and talked hopefully of Salus and Morva's contemplated rescue.

Toward noon, as they neared the borders of an extensive forest, they suddenly came upon a hut which was half concealed amid the snow and stunted larch trees and Siberian spruce bushes.

This hut was deserted. After they had entered, Valmer discovered that some person had left a suit of clothes in the hut. Valmer determined to disguise himself in this suit and try and find the exiles' camp.

He did so, and set out, leaving Mazie in the hut, and promising to return soon.

But a short while after he had gone Mazie heard a knock on the door. Opening it, a dark-faced youth strode in, who was apparently so exhausted that he immediately threw himself on the floor of the hut and fell into a sound slumber.

After several hours' wait Valmer returned and the first glance he gave at the stranger's face told him it was Michael Gantsk, the traitor.

Now, Valmer conceived a bold plan, which was to dress Mazie up in Gantsk's clothes and try to make their way into the exiles' camp in disguise and effect the escape of Morva and Salus.

Mazie heartily agreed to the plan, and Gantsk was bound and relieved of his clothes, and Mazie put them on; then they set out.

It will be remembered that at the time of Morva's encounter with Bruno that shortly after a man, dressed as a minstrel,

was seen on the opposite side of the camp. Morva recognized him instantly as Kalatka, his father. After the Cossacks had returned from pursuing the bear and putting the Buriats to flight, Kalatka sang and danced for the benefit of the Cossacks and their officers. While doing so, Valmer and Mazie, both disguised, entered the camp. Nobody paid much attention to them, as they supposed Mazie to be Michael Gantsk, the spy.

But trouble was in store for all hands; some peasants had discovered Michael Gantsk, bound and lying on the floor of the hut. On being released he told them a trumped-up story and immediately started for the exiles' camp.

Meantime, the vanquished Buriats, fearing that Kalatka, Valmer and Mazie had fallen into the hands of the Cossacks, decided to strike the trail of the exile convoy and hang on in the rear until they could find out if their friends were prisoners, and, if so, try to release them.

CHAPTER VII.

BILL PERKINS, THE GENTLEMAN FROM AMERICA.

At the time of the occurrence of the incidents last narrated, certain events were transpiring in the city of St. Petersburg which were destined to have an influence upon the fate of the boy slaves of Siberia.

A more gloomy or uninviting place than the subterranean apartment into which we are about to usher the reader could scarcely be imagined.

Imagine a large cellar, the walls of which were made of rough stone, the floor only the smooth earth, the ceiling exposing the blackened cross-beams of the floor above, and festooned with cobwebs.

There had once been a pair of broad stairs leading upward to the room above, but these had been torn down, and the opening at the head had been securely boarded over.

The only way of entrance now remaining was the underground passage opening upon the river, at a point distant perhaps a quarter of a mile from the bridge Nicholas.

The opening of the passage leading from the river to the cellar was closed by means of a door which slid up and down in grooves formed for that purpose, and which worked by means of lever power.

Seated just inside the closed door, upon the night in question, was an old man of withered and repulsive appearance, clad in the coarse rags of an inhabitant of the gutters.

One hand grasped an iron ring which was suspended from a rope in the ceiling, and which communicated with the lever by which the door was moved so that a strong pull would send the door upward.

The old man was the door-tender of this strange, underground place.

The city clocks had struck the hour of ten. The night was dark and snowy. Suddenly there came a loud rap against the door, followed by the muffled sound of shouts and the splash of oars in the water.

The old door-tender started up.

"Fourteen hundred and forty-four!" he cried.

"A B C!" was the answer.

The old door-keeper pulled upon the rope.

The door shot upward.

Upon the instant a man, dripping with water as though he had just come from the river, staggered into the room.

The door sank silently back into its place.

The man was worthy of more than passing notice. Of tall, commanding figure, well-proportioned, and powerful of limb, with a finely formed head, handsome features, and a bold, resolute eye, he would have been noticed anywhere as a type of manly beauty seldom seen in Russia—nor was he a Russian.

From the fact that a pass signal was exchanged between the man calling himself Perkins and the door-keeper of the cellar, it would appear that it was a place of secret meeting. Such, indeed, was the fact. The place was the meeting-room of the most mysterious and terrible organization that ever cursed a civilized country. Strange to say, the organization had no connection with the Nihilists. It was composed of men whose trade was murder, and its object was to further the personal ends of its members at the sacrifice of any human life that chanced to stand in their way. Its members cared nothing for Russian liberty, or the good of the Russian people. Their daggers, and their secret assassins, were at the command of those who could purchase them.

Such was the character of the organization into whose secret lodge the American had been so readily admitted.

There could be but one explanation. He must be a member of the terrible order.

Such was the fact. The brave and handsome American was a member of the "League of Death," as it was called.

A physiognomist would have said that the American was a noble, honest-hearted man; hence his being a member of the dread Russian Death League was, to say the least, somewhat remarkable, not to say mysterious.

The fact that an attempt had been made to secure his arrest would also seem to warrant the belief that the police were aware of his connection with the dreaded league, and yet this man had, within two hours previous to his adventure with the police, been received at the American legation with every manifestation of confidence and respect. He had, moreover, been that very day in secret consultation with General Mellikoff, of the Imperial Secret Police.

For a long time General Mellikoff and his aids had been aware of the existence of a league of murderers in St. Petersburg, who sought the life of the Emperor Alexander the Second.

Several ineffectual attempts had been made upon the despot's life, and they had been attributed to the Nihilists, and the reader will recall the fact that Salus Vorviski and Morva Kalatka had been accused of complicity in this plot to murder the emperor.

As Salus had suspected, his evil uncle had set the police upon his track, and he it was who had privately hired Michael Kantsk to pay particular attention to securing the arrest of Salus. Further, the dishonest guardian had, by means of bribery, which is a potent power in all circles of the Russian government, secured Gantsk's appointment as a member of the guards to accompany the young exiles to Siberia.

The gypsy had been instructed to watch the boys until they were safe in the depths of the mine.

Within an hour after the arrival of the American, the members of the League of Death began to assemble.

Each one gave the same password that the American had used, and—what was most remarkable—every one wore a mask. (The American had placed his upon his face before any of the band arrived, and the old doorkeeper was the only one who had ever seen his face—at least, at the secret meetings.)

Each member, moreover, was known only by a number.

When the meeting broke up, after the transaction of some matters of no importance to our story, the American left the lodge, accompanied by the old doorkeeper, to whose instrumentality he was indebted for his membership.

When they reached a neighboring street the two men parted, and moved away in opposite directions, but if the old doorkeeper had looked behind him a few moments later he would have seen the American stealthily following him.

The old man led the American directly to a fairly respectable house upon a narrow street devoted to small shops, and entered one which was occupied by a maker of artificial flowers. It was the shop of the old woman with whom Mazie, Salus' sweetheart, had lived ever since she was a young child.

The old man admitted himself by means of a night-key, and soon after a light appeared in one of the windows upon the ground floor.

The American drew near the window and peered through an opening between the slats of the open-work shutters which covered it.

He was upon the eve of striking a clew to a mystery to solve which he had journeyed all the way from America. He had not crossed the ocean for naught. Although he knew it not, he was upon the eve of a discovery which was to solve the mystery, and which also was to prove of great importance to the boy slaves of Siberia. But more than all was it of interest to the future of Mazie, the brave, devoted maiden, who had followed the young exiles to Siberia.

CHAPTER VIII.

STRIKING A CLEW.

Peering through the aperture in the window-blind of the old flower-maker's shop, the American saw the doorkeeper of the Death League seated at one end of a small dressing-table, opposite a dark-faced woman who had passed the meridian of life, but who still retained some traces of former beauty.

It needed but a close scrutiny of the old flower-maker—for she the woman was—to satisfy the American that she was one of that nomadic omnipresent race called gypsies.

"The woman is one of the gypsy race. At last I have tracked the old ground rat to his burrow. Let us see what will be the result," thought the American.

He placed his ear against the window.

"I tell you, Elfortana, there is money to be made out of the child. You were a fool to let her slip out of your hands, old woman," said the old gutter-rat.

"She ran away. Do you think I am a fool, Rodent? Would I have let her escape me, had I known her intentions? No, I thought she was contented here," rejoined the woman.

"The king of our tribe intrusted her to your care, and had he not perished in the storm which wrecked the vessel upon which he sailed for Corsica, he would have, ere this time, claimed the girl from you. I know it was his intention to communicate with the girl's parents and offer to restore the child for a large reward. I never asked you how the child first fell into the possession of our tribe, for while the chief lived I cared not to meddle with his affairs," said the old man called Rodent.

"You did well, for the king had a way of quieting those who sought his secrets more effectual than pleasant," and Elfortana, the gypsy flower-maker, drew the finger of her shriveled hand across her throat, suggestively.

"True, but now you and I can work together, if you have the knowledge I suppose you possess. Tell me all about the child, and I will help you bleed the pockets of the wealthy ones to whom she belongs."

"We must first get the child in our possession again."

"That is quite true, and I will undertake to accomplish that. You told me at our last meeting that the girl—by what name did you say she was called?"

"Mazie."

"Ah, yes, that was it. You said she left the city in company with one Valmer, a Tartar guide, who was on his way to Siberia. Since you gave me that information I have not been idle, and I know that the girl Mazie was intimate with a youth called Salus Vorviski, who had been sent to Siberia for the crime of Nihilism. I have come to the conclusion that it is more than probable that your charge has gone to join her young friend."

"I doubt not that you are right, Rodent, and as you are the only member of my tribe at hand, I will trust you and tell you all. If we can make a rich haul out of the girl's parents I will share it with you."

"You can trust me fully, Elfortana. We are of one race. The hands of all men seem ever to be raised against us, and we should stand by each other and work together against those who are not of our blood."

"You speak truly. I will relate the story of the girl Mazie, and you shall judge for yourself if she be of value to us. Years ago our tribe was encamped upon the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, when an American vessel was wrecked in a terrible storm, and the child whom I call Mazie was washed ashore by the waves. She was lashed to the body of a man whose rich clothing and costly jewelry told that he was a person of wealth."

"When our king found the pair the man was insensible, and the child—a little thing, two or three years of age—was crying as if its heart would break."

"Our king was a shrewd, keen man, ever upon the lookout for gain, and he at once removed the child from the body of the man, and giving her into my charge, he sent me away with her into the mountains. The man was restored to life and he asked eagerly for his child. The king feigned to know nothing of her. Then the man who had been cast up by the sea offered the king a large sum if he could discover his child, living, or her dead body, if so be she had perished in the water. The beach was searched for miles, but of course no trace of the child was found. At last the man, who was the father of the missing child, gave up the quest in despair and went away."

"Before he departed from our camp he gave the chief his name and address. Not long after his departure the chief wrote to him, telling him that the child had been picked up on the beach by some Spanish gypsies, not under his rule, and carried away. The king offered, however, to restore the child for a large sum of money. The father of the child lost no time in answering this letter, and he agreed to the king's terms without demur."

"The child would have been at once sent back to her father, but just at that time my husband and the king, who had long been anything but warm friends, had a terrible quarrel and the king threatened my husband's life. One night, my husband came to me and said he had made all arrangements for our secret flight to Russia, for he feared the king, as well he might. My husband bade me take the child with us, and I did so. Soon after my husband died of smallpox, which was then raging in Russia. We had intended to secure the reward for the return of the child, but the death of my husband overthrew

these plans. Further, I learned that the spies of the king of the gypsies were searching for us everywhere. Fearing for my own life, I changed my name, and with the little savings of years I opened this shop. I had learned the trade of a flower-maker during my youth."

"The time passed, and I never tried to communicate with the parent of little Mazie, for I feared to do so. But now that our king is dead I am anxious to get the reward which will be paid for her restoration."

"We will get it," said Rodent, earnestly. "I'll get the girl back again first, though," he added.

The American heard all this with joy.

"So, so, I have struck a clew at last. The trail will lead me into the dread land of the exiles. I'll follow it, and if the captain's lost child is above ground, Bill Perkins is the man to find her!"

He listened for some time longer, but he learned no more that was of value to his object, except that Rodent, the old gypsy, was going in pursuit of Mazie.

* * * * *

During the long journey from St. Petersburg, Salus Vorviski and Morva had not fraternized to any great extent with any of their companions in misfortune, save one man who had excited their sympathy. This man was in the last stages of pulmonary consumption. Salus and Morva had been very kind to him all along, and he had more than once expressed his gratitude.

"I feel, my brothers, that I cannot last much longer," he said, addressing the boys. "I have been a bad, wicked man, and I have led an evil life, but before I die I am a-going to do one good deed. Here inclosed in this piece of deerskin is a manuscript which I give into your hands, Morva Kalatka. Guard it as you would your life. Trust it not for a single moment out of your possession, and let no human being know that you have it until the times comes, as come it will, when you are brought face to face with death by the order of the Czar. Then, and not until then, open this packet and say, 'This will save me; place it in the hands of the Czar.'"

Wonderingly, and more than half suspecting that the man's mind was diseased, and that the power of the paper was a mental hallucination, Morva accepted the mysterious manuscript and concealed it upon his person.

The next morning the man who had given Morva the strange document, to which he attributed marvelous power, was found dead.

* * * * *

It will be remembered that Valmer, Kalatka and Mazie, all disguised, had entered the exiles' camp. They remained there for a few hours, with the consent of the Cossacks.

While in the convict convoy camp Kalatka and Valmer had met and discussed various plans for the rescue of Morva and Salus. Valmer's plan appeared the easiest to accomplish. So it was decided on. Kalatka was to concoct a poisonous drink and Mazie was to approach the guards at night and induce them to partake of it. Mazie succeeded in doing her part. Valmer had left the camp some hours previous and had succeeded in buying a team and sleigh from a peasant near the camp, and at night drove up near the camp at a point agreed upon with Kalatka and awaited him and the two boys. Kalatka succeeded in filing the chains from Morva and Salus, and under the cover of darkness conveyed them past the guards, who had been rendered unconscious by the drink Mazie had given them, reached the sleigh and started to drive away, when, to Kalatka's consternation, Mazie had not made her appearance. She was to precede him and the boys. They feared she had been detained by the Cossacks.

However, it was too late for them to go back, so they started off for the camp of Kalatka's followers, who had been hanging on the rear of the convict convoy. They had not gone very far when they came face to face with the spy, Gantsk, and a dozen or so peasants he had enlisted in his services to try to capture Valmer and Mazie, so he could wreak his vengeance on them for the trick they had played on him in the deserted hut. But our friends decided to fight to the death. And fight they did, and succeeded in breaking through the spy's cohorts and reaching the camp of Valmer's friends. Then, knowing they would be immediately pursued, all set off on horseback. The bear and vultures also accompanied them.

They were finally directed to a cave in a hollow between two mountains. This was one of Kalatka's strongholds. On the second day of their stay in the cave Valmer started out on a scouting expedition. After having been gone about three hours, he returned with the news that Gantsk and his band were close by.

The conflict between the escaping exiles and Michael Gantsk's party had been heard at the convoy camp and a party of Cossacks had been dispatched to find out what the trouble was.

They came across Gantsk and his party and learned for the first time of the escape of the exiles and also who they had been harboring in their camp in the persons of Valmer and Kalatka. They returned to the convoy camp and a party of Cossacks was immediately sent out on the exiles' track.

CHAPTER IX.

PERKINS AND THE RUSSIAN GYPSY.

At the time of these occurrences two men were posting across the snow-clad steppes of Russia, bent upon accomplishing the same object.

One of these men knew that the other was on his way to Siberia, and he knew his object.

The other was ignorant of the object of his competitor.

The first of these men was Perkins, the American.

The other was Rodent, the Russian spy.

Perkins had just twelve hours the start of the gypsy, and he maintained the lead until the fifth day of his journey.

The American was provided with a covered sleigh, drawn by a team of excellent horses, and he had secured an honest, reliable driver.

Perkins hoped to overtake the convoy of exiles before the gypsy, and if Mazie were with them he would tell her who she really was, and make off with her before the gypsy came upon the scene.

As the reader may have naturally concluded, Perkins was deeply interested in the recovery of the lost child, whom he believed Mazie to be.

The American was a professional detective.

Upon the fifth day an accident occurred to the American, which caused an unavoidable delay.

Just at nightfall, as they were nearing a postal station, they were obliged to pass through a defile in the hills, through which the route led them.

The sleigh had reached a point midway between two abrupt cliffs, when suddenly a great mass of snow came sliding down directly before them, and completely filled the pass.

They found they could go no farther, so they turned the sleigh around and started back the way they had come.

Another sleigh was seen rapidly approaching over the route which the American's vehicle had just passed, and a moment later the two teams came head to head. The American sprang to his feet in his sleigh, and beheld himself face to face with Rodent, the Russian gypsy.

When Perkins, the American, and Rodent, the gypsy spy, came face to face in the narrow, snow-filled pass they stood for a moment regarding each other in silence.

Upon the face of the old Russian gypsy there was at first an expression of dazed surprise. The gypsy had not the faintest suspicion up to the present moment that his American "brother of the Death League" had left St. Petersburg. But now, while he silently gazed into the face of the American, his features, which for the time were not clothed in their impenetrable mask, betrayed the thoughts which were rapidly forming themselves in his mind, and Perkins saw the expression of surprise give place to one of suspicion and distrust.

A hundred thoughts chased themselves through the cunning brain of the plotting old gypsy. He recalled many little things in the conduct of the American during the short period of their acquaintance, which at the time had passed unheeded, but in which he could now read a deep meaning.

A suspicion of the truth arose in his mind.

"The man Perkins is an American; so is the girl, Mazie. By my soul, I believe the man is in search of the girl! Why did I not suspect this before? I wonder what the American knows?"

"Well, this is a surprise!" exclaimed the American. "Who would have expected to meet you here?"

"I might say the same of you," answered the gypsy.

"Business for an American firm. You see, I'm in for a little speculation—something they are not much up to in this uncivilized country. I've got a great idea, a great scheme. I'm going to get up a corner in furs. See?"

"Yes," retorted the gypsy, drily.

"It seems our route lay in the same course, but there is no possibility of proceeding in this pass. What do you propose to do?" continued Rodent, watching the face of the American narrowly.

"You can see for yourself we are about to return. We cannot do otherwise," answered the American.

"I see I shall be obliged to do the same."

"Undoubtedly."

"Shall we travel in company, my 'brother?'"

"As you please."

The American's face flushed as the gypsy thus claimed him as a brother of the infamous Death League.

Rodent ordered his driver to wheel about, and a moment later the two sleighs were under way, the gypsy leading.

It now became a question of cunning as to which of the two men who were in search of Mazie should first overtake the convoy.

The long halt of the convoy at the camp, where so many incidents occurred, and which was caused by a delay in the arrival of supplies, favored the two men who were hastening to overtake it.

That night, no station being at hand, the two sleighs drew together, and Rodent said:

"Let us encamp here for the night. We will be company for each other, my brother, and true brothers of the League are bound to help each other. Should a brother prove false, you know the penalty is death."

"True, we will camp here in company."

The two drivers fraternized harmoniously, and made all preparations for passing the night.

Rodent and the American conversed together, but there was a restraint and distrust in their manner which neither quite concealed from the other.

At last they lay down to sleep, each in his own sleigh, the drivers having made themselves a bed under their respective vehicles.

They had reached a point not many versts distant from the point at which the exiles' convoy were that night encamped, although they did not know that such was the fact.

"I shall not sleep much to-night," thought Perkins, as he lay upon his back on the soft fur robes which formed his couch in the bottom of the roomy sleigh and watched the twinkling stars which studded the cold, clear northern sky.

"That old rascal, Rodent, is none too good to put his knife through my heart, and I am sure he is more than half convinced of my real object in coming to Siberia."

As he lay reflecting, a plan which he had half formed during the day shaped itself definitely in his mind.

"Yes, I'll try it," he finally decided.

The plan by which the American hoped to outwit the gypsy, and leave him in the lurch, was this:

He would wait until the gypsy and his driver were sound asleep, then he would quietly awaken his own driver and bribe him to assist him in drawing the sleigh away to a safe distance. Then they would harness both his own team and that of Rodent's to it and dash away, leaving the gypsy without the means of overtaking them, for, of course, he could proceed but slowly on foot, as he would then be obliged to do.

The night was well advanced when the American proceeded to put his scheme into execution. Silently he arose and crept towards the sleigh of Rodent, wishing to satisfy himself whether the gypsy were really asleep, or only feigning so to be.

To the right was a narrow belt of Siberian fir and larch. Save this break in the monotony of the dreary winter landscape, the earth seemed a desert of white, without life, deserted, dead.

The American's feet gave forth no sound as he approached the sleigh in which the gypsy had sought repose. He reached the vehicle and, bending forward, peered into it.

He only barely escaped uttering an exclamation of surprise, for the sleigh was empty. Rodent was gone!

The American was nonplussed, and he was about to turn from the sleigh when he felt a stinging sensation about his throat, and he was jerked backward to the earth. There was a terrible pressure upon his throat, and a weight upon his chest. He could not breathe. His eyes started from their sockets, and all the blood in his body seemed surging to his brain, and he experienced a sensation as though his head was bursting. He knew that he was being strangled, but he could not free himself. He saw a strange, wild face, surrounded with a mass of long, black hair, bending over him with a look of malignant satisfaction.

It was a face he had never seen before.

The world grew dark to the brave American. The ring of a thousand anvils was in his ears. He thought this must be death; and then all was blank.

The gypsy had sprung his trap and his victim was caught in the toils.

Earlier in the evening, while the American lay in his sleigh, reflecting upon his future plans, a strange meeting occurred.

Rodent was as wide awake in his sleigh as was the American in his, when he heard a cat-like tread upon the snow, and rising upon his elbow he looked over the side of the vehicle and saw a man stealing toward him from the belt of fir and larch to the right of the camp.

As the nocturnal prowler crept nearer, Rodent fancied he could detect something familiar about him, and as he came still closer the gypsy recognized him.

"Zampa, the New Zealander, by all that's wonderful!" thought Rodent. "Our chief of the Death League told me confidentially that Zampa had been sent after the exiles to forever silence the tongue of Martin Ludyer, who possessed our secrets, and whom we feared the hardships of the mines might force to make a confession to secure his own liberty. I am glad to meet Zampa. He is a skilful assassin. The half savage from New Zealand has a way of strangling people I never saw equaled except by the thugs of India."

Zampa came nearer. He was clad in a close-fitting suit of reindeer hide. His hair was long and straight, and as coarse as the tail of a horse. He had small, fierce black eyes, high cheek bones and a receding forehead. A naked knife was thrust through his belt and a case of skin upon his back contained a number of light, iron, steel-pointed harpoons.

"Hi, hist!" hissed the New Zealander, as he saw and recognized the face of Rodent. "Me see you from de trees when you first come here. Me not come out till you do, fear spoil some t'ings you want to do. Who man? Why you be here?"

"Get into the sleigh and lie down out of sight. There's a cunning American in the other sleigh and I want to outwit him," said Rodent, in a cautious whisper.

The New Zealander crawled into the sleigh.

When he had crouched down by Rodent's side out of sight of any one outside of the vehicle, the gypsy said:

"I want you to help me. The man in yonder sleigh is a spy. Of that I am now convinced. He joined our League, and knows something of our secrets. He is now on his way to overtake the exile convoy, hoping to find with them a young girl. I, too, am after this same girl, and if I can spirit her away from the convoy before him I shall make many roubles. If you will help me, I'll give you fifty of those same roubles, and you can drink and eat for months in idleness. What do you say?"

"Zampa help," laconically answered the wildman of the Pacific Isles.

So Zampa stole up behind Perkins and seized him by the throat, as detailed in a preceding paragraph. After he had been rendered unconscious they put him into his own sleigh, entered the gypsy's sleigh and drove off to the convoy camp to try and find Mazie. Just as they were on the outskirts of the camp they saw a bloodhound standing over something which lay on the snow. On reaching the dog, great was their surprise to find it was the object of their search. Mazie had lost her way in trying to meet Valmer's sleigh, and it was Kalatka's dog Don who was guarding her.

Mazie was lying on the snow, unconscious from fatigue. They lifted her into the sleigh and started off with her, Don following the sleigh closely behind.

CHAPTER X.

ZAMPA ENTRAPS RODENT.

The cool air beating against her burning cheeks as the sleigh sped along finally completed Mazie's restoration, so far that she started up and, gazing into the face of Rodent, asked:

"Where am I?"

"Safe, my dear, and with a friend. I found you, fainting, in the snow and I am taking you to my home," answered the gypsy, reassuringly.

"But I must go back. I was to join Val—I mean some friends. Oh, please stop the sleigh and let me get out. My name is Michael Gantsk, and I belong to the convoy of exiles," cried Mazie, excitedly, and she was on the point of leaping from the sleigh. She still wore Gantsk's clothes.

"Not so fast. I know who you are. Your name is Mazie. You are not Michael Gantsk. If you are in boy's clothes, let me tell you you cannot deceive me. I have seen you before, though you do not remember my face, and I know the old flower-maker who is the only mother you ever knew. I came all the way to Siberia to find you, and now I shall keep you until somebody who wants you worse than I do receives you at my hands. I tell you, girl, I mean you no harm, so take things kindly, pretty one, and you shall be treated well, but you shall not leave me," said Rodent.

"I do not understand you. Explain your meaning."

"I will not tell you more at present. Suffice it to know that there is a mystery about you which I shall solve."

"Tell me one thing if you can. Is the old flower-maker my real mother? Something has always told me she was not, and as though it were a dream, I sometimes seem to remember a fair woman who called me her darling," said Mazie, eagerly.

"You shall know all in good time if you will trust me," answered Rodent.

Zampa had been listening to every word, and when he learned that Mazie was a girl, and saw her lovely face clearly as he now had time to do, his features assumed a peculiar expression, and he shot a cunning glance at Rodent.

"I fear you are plotting against my welfare, but for the present I am in your power," said Mazie.

"You will yet thank me for what I am doing."

"Who is this strange-looking man, and why does he gaze at me so? I feel afraid of him."

Rodent glanced quickly at the New Zealander, and although the savage dropped his eyes at once, the gypsy read in them an expression which he did not like. Rodent knew the character of the savage, and from that moment he distrusted him.

All day long the journey was continued, with the exception of a short halt at mid-day.

Just at nightfall they came in sight of a strange, dilapidated structure, built of stone, which stood upon the borders of a frozen stream. A fringe of stunted trees stood along the banks of the stream, within which a part of the rear of the structure was hidden. The building was low and massive, and the peculiarities of its design told that it was of most ancient origin. Indeed, it was built after an architectural design which dated back perhaps hundreds of years. It resembled a rude sort of fort, and was not unlike the buildings of a like character which were constructed by the ancient Norsemen in the land of the frozen North. Probably it had been the work of a race that had passed away.

Zampa had wintered in the ancient ruin years previous, when in company with several of his countrymen he had deserted from an American whaling vessel and made his way southward to this point from the Arctic Sea.

A half-ruined moat, which was partially filled with the accumulated debris of years, surrounded the old fortification.

Zampa drove directly up to its banks, and halting there he leaped from the sleigh.

"Me take horse round by frozen water in back of house. You stay here, me come back soon," said the New Zealander.

He led the horse around upon the ice and disappeared. Rodent stood regarding the gloomy old fortress rather distrustfully. To his naturally suspicious mind it seemed like a fitting place for the commission of some dreadful crime.

Soon Zampa returned.

"Now come, me show you the way," he said.

The New Zealander walked along the side of the moat until a point was reached where the side of the moat had been bridged by a single log, and which, while it offered a passage for man, was utterly impracticable for the horses to pass over.

Zampa crossed this improvised bridge, and Rodent grasped Mazie's arm and led her across it close behind him.

An arched entrance, which was without doors, was now before them. Still following the New Zealander, the gypsy and Mazie passed through the entrance, and found themselves within a narrow court.

Don, the faithful bloodhound, followed close at Mazie's heels. Upon each side of the court was a heavy wooden door.

Zampa pushed open the one upon the right hand and the party entered, the bloodhound following.

They were now within a small, prison-like apartment, which was without windows, light being afforded by small slits in the massive walls, and which had evidently been intended to serve the purpose of loopholes in case of attack as well as windows.

Zampa, at Rodent's request, brought the robes from the sleigh and prepared a couch in one corner of the room, which was intended for Mazie.

The New Zealander then procured some fuel, in the shape of dead branches of trees from the timber along the water-course, and proceeded to kindle a fire in the deep fire-place with which the room was provided.

Rodent now said:

"We will leave you now for the night. You must know that any attempt at escape would be useless, for even if you could leave this room, as you will be unable to do, because I shall fasten the door securely upon the outside, you would perish

upon the steppes should you attempt to make your way back to the exile convoy."

With this he turned to the door, followed by the New Zealander.

The faithful hound lay at her feet all night long, watching over her vigilantly. The intelligent animal had attached himself to her, and his friendship was yet to prove of great service.

Next day Rodent busied himself in completing a strange contrivance which he had brought with him from St. Petersburg in a stout box, and which his driver had noticed he guarded with the utmost care. It was an invention upon which the gypsy, who possessed considerable mechanical skill, had lavished much time and thought. He had not dared to leave it behind him for fear it might fall into the hands of the police, who were just then on the lookout for such articles, and then he hoped to find time to complete it.

The machine, if such it could properly be termed, was an iron cone about three feet in circumference. At the apex of the cone a long iron rod projected upward.

The whole affair was simple enough in appearance, and apparently harmless, yet it was in reality an infernal-machine of the most deadly character.

Zampa watched Rodent, wonderingly, as he put the finishing touches upon it.

"At last I have perfected my invention," he said, more to himself than to the New Zealander, as he placed the infernal-machine upon the floor, with the iron rod uppermost. "This is a torpedo, Zampa, and it is filled with dynamite. Were you to run against the rod it would explode and blow you to atoms. It is intended to be buried in the earth or snow, with the rod projecting above the surface, so that it will appear like a harmless iron rod. Place this in the path of one whom it is desirable to remove, and should he chance to strike his foot against it he would be blown to pieces. It may yet rid Russia of a tyrant," Rodent explained.

Zampa edged away from the strange instrument of death.

The apartment in which this conversation occurred was situated next to that in which Mazie was confined, and as there was a narrow aperture between the ceiling and the top of the division wall, all this conversation about the torpedo was overheard by her.

That day Rodent visited her at the regular meal hours of civilized countries.

Mazie noticed that the gypsy constantly wore a pair of heavy horse-pistols in his belt, and she determined to attempt to possess herself of one of them.

Watching closely, the wished-for opportunity soon came, and without being detected by him she stole one of Rodent's pistols from his belt and concealed it in the folds of her dress.

Rodent left the room without discovering his loss.

As soon as he was gone, Mazie hid the pistol in a crevice in the wall on the side in which was the door.

Toward night, accompanied by Zampa, who appeared quite anxious to show the gypsy all about the place, Rodent went down into the cellar under the main court of the fortification. A heavy iron trap-door opened in the floor of the court, and after raising this, they descended a steep flight of stairs.

The cellar was quite spacious and dry.

Rodent was thinking, perhaps, it would be the best place to confine Mazie, when the torch with which Zampa had provided himself went out, and they were left in the darkness.

"Me go get light. Zampa quick come back," said the New Zealander, and before Rodent could offer any remonstrance, Zampa had made his way up the stairs and was gone.

Rodent stood still and awaited his return.

Five minutes elapsed.

"Why don't the rascal return? He has had plenty of time," muttered Rodent, impatiently.

Rodent made his way to the bottom of the stairs, and groped his way upward.

He reached the top, when, with an exclamation, he reeled back.

"Great heavens! the door is closed upon me," he cried.

Such was the fact, the heavy iron door had been closed down.

CHAPTER XI.

PERKINS ON RODENT'S TRAIL.

It was morning when the driver who had driven Rodent's sleigh awoke. He was very much astonished to find the sleigh under which he had gone to sleep had disappeared. He sprang up and looked all about, rubbing his eyes to make

sure that he was really awake, and that it was not all a dream.

The sleigh was nowhere to be seen.

The vehicle which had mysteriously vanished was the property of the driver's master in St. Petersburg and the honest fellow's first thought was for the safety of his master's vehicle.

He started to awaken the driver of Perkins' sleigh. Then he looked into the sleigh and found Perkins unconscious. Producing a flask of liquor, he poured some down the man's throat and it soon brought him to. The driver explained to him what had taken place.

"The rascal has outwitted me, after all. To think of an old gypsy getting the best of William Perkins, from old Vermont! But I'll follow him, blame his ugly picture, and if he harms the girl, dash me, if I don't scalp him! Hitch up the horse, and let's be off. You can come along, if you want to, and try to git back your rig," said Perkins. The last was addressed to the disconsolate Russian whose sleigh Rodent had appropriated.

The horses were quickly attached to the sleigh, and in a few moments they were speeding along on the track of Rodent.

The driver of the missing sleigh had thankfully accepted Perkins' offer, and he had mounted upon the forward seat beside the American's driver.

They passed the place where the exiles' convoy had been encamped, but as the convoy had started upon its march early in the morning they saw nothing of it.

"Probably the old gypsy stopped the sleigh outside of the camp. I wonder if he has succeeded in kidnapping the girl? I would give something to know if he had or had not abducted her. I can only judge that his plot has succeeded by the fact that he has kept on to the northwest. He would not have left the convoy without the girl," reflected Perkins.

In due time the American arrived at the place where Rodent had stopped, and as they came to a halt and were making preparations to remain till after dinner in the same place, one of the Russians suddenly uttered an exclamation of satisfaction.

"There were there persons here. See, there are three different footprints in the snow, and one is small, like that of a woman," he said.

"You are right, and I am satisfied the girl I seek is a captive in the hands of Rodent and the strange, long-haired, wild-looking man who tried to murder me last night," said Perkins, as he examined the footprints.

Leaving Perkins following upon Rodent's trail as rapidly as his horses could travel, we will turn our attention for the time to our young friends, the boy exiles, who had been doomed to become boy slaves of the mines.

Valmer's announcement that Gantsk and his band were close in pursuit of the fugitives filled all within the underground place of temporary refuge with anxiety.

It was true that the natural advantages of the location would enable the little party to prevent the approach of the foe to the entrance of the cave for a long time.

It would, on the contrary, be equally easy for the Cossack leader to prevent any one's leaving the cave.

"We can hold the cave until they starve us out," said Valmer to his men.

At this moment Kalatka appeared from the cave. "I think we had better build a breastwork across this end of the ledge," he advised.

"I agree with you," assented Valmer.

All hands fell to work, and a barrier about three feet high was erected in a few moments.

It was formed of rocks, of which there was no lack, large masses having been detached from the mountainside. The wall extended from the abrupt face of the cliff to the edge of the precipice.

The barricade completed, the division of Kalatka's party who had been detailed to guard the pass crouched down behind it and awaited the advance of the enemies.

Valmer rested his rifle, which was, it will be remembered, of an improved pattern, upon the top of the wall, and took aim along the ledge over which the foe must come.

Soon a dark form came into view, then followed another, and another, until Valmer counted ten men coming along the narrow ledge in single file.

"I'll wait until they approach a little nearer, and then I'll let them know we are on the lookout for them," Valmer whispered to Kalatka.

Slowly and with caution, which evinced a fear of falling into an ambush, the enemy continued to approach.

"It is Argego!" said Kalatka.

"Yes, the wretch is leading our foes. He must have known of this cave. I am going to pick him off as soon as he comes a few paces nearer," answered the guide.

Valmer brought his Remington rifle to a full cock and took deliberate aim. The next instant the sharp crack of the discharged weapon rang out upon the air, but even as Valmer pressed the trigger the spy at whom he aimed threw himself flat upon the rocks. The bullet intended for him whistled harmlessly over his body, and was buried in the breast of the man behind him.

Instantly Argego sprang to his feet and, following close upon the heels of those behind him who had at once taken to flight, he beat a hasty retreat.

The fate of the unfortunate man who had met his death warned the pursuers of the boy-exiles that they could not surprise the fugitives as they had hoped to do.

The night passed without further attempt on the part of Michael Gantsk's party to reach the cave.

Gantsk consulted with Argego, who assured him there was no way save by the narrow ledge by which the fugitives could leave the cave, and they determined to encamp at the entrance of the pass where the shelf-like ledge commenced, and to remain there until hunger compelled the escaped ones to surrender.

Day after day went by, and one after another the horses perished, and such portions of their flesh as could be eaten were devoured by the famishing Tartars and the Baikal mountaineers.

At last the day came when the last horse had been devoured and all the other provisions were exhausted. The men became impatient, and it was plain to see that they could not much longer be depended upon to share the sufferings of the hunted exiles.

The time had come when Valmer and Kalatka determined to no longer insist upon their comrades remaining with them to perish of hunger.

"My trusty friends," said Kalatka, "Valmer and myself no longer wish to have you sacrifice yourselves for us. Starvation only awaits us, and while we will die here with the young exiles, whom we have rescued sooner than surrender to our foes, you can surrender if you will."

The devoted followers of the Vulture King consulted together, and suffering such as only those who have realized the terrible pangs of famine can imagine, proved stronger than any sentiment of friendship, and they decided to give themselves up to the foe. They reasoned that they could not benefit their friends by remaining.

The same day a white flag was prepared, and with Ivan in advance, bearing this token of the vanquished, the followers of Valmer and Kalatka marched out of the cave in single file and surrendered to Michael Gantsk, who sent them under guard to the nearest military post.

We may say here, however, that these cunning children of the mountains nearly all escaped from their guards, and separating, eventually returned to their various homes.

There now remained in the cave only four human beings—Kalatka, Valmer, and the two boys, Morva and Salus.

As Kalatka sat watching the vultures in their cage, and was trying to devise some plan by which they might be made of service in this trying extremity, an idea of which he had previously thought occurred to him.

"Morva! Morva!" he called.

The youth hurried to his father's side.

"Take from the inner lining of your leggings a strip of bleached deerskin."

Unquestioningly the boy obeyed.

Kalatka, then, with the point of his knife, made a small incision in his own hand, causing the blood to exude quite freely.

Then, placing a feather from one of the vulture's wings in Morva's hand, he continued:

"Write upon the white deerskin, in my blood, the message I am about to dictate."

Morva dipped the quill in his father's blood, and prepared to write.

As his father dictated, he soon inscribed upon the improvised parchment the following message:

"TO QUEKINHOFF, OR ANY GOOD BROTHER WHO MAY READ THIS: Feed this bird all he can eat, then make a package of food and secure it upon him in such a way that it will not prevent his flying. Then set the bird free. I am starving with three companions in a cave. We are besieged, as you may know, by the Cossacks.

KALATKA."

When this message, written with blood, was completed, Kalatka secured it upon "Rover," and carrying him to the mouth of the cave he set him free.

The huge bird soared upward and flew away to the southward.

CHAPTER XII.

MYSTERIOUS SOUNDS—THE AMERICAN IN SIGHT—ZAMPA SURPRISED

When Zampa left Rodent in the cellar under the ancient fortification, as related in the chapter preceding the last, it was in accordance with a cunning plan which the New Zealander had been devising ever since Mazie fell into their hands.

"He! he! he!" laughed the Islander, as he reached the top of the stairs, and let the heavy iron door fall back in its place. "Zampa catch him in de trap. Dat berry much good. He no get out," and as he spoke the New Zealander slid a bolt which fastened down the door of the trap.

So mumbling to himself the hideous New Zealander made his way to the door of the room in which Mazie was confined.

Drawing the bolt, he pushed the door open and looked in.

As the door opened, Mazie, who had been reclining upon the couch at the further end of the room, sprang to her feet, and Don, the faithful blood-hound, started up from his position at her feet with an ominous growl.

The moment her eyes fell upon the Islander, Mazie knew that something had occurred which had made him master of her fate, at least, in his own estimation. She read exultation and a boldness in his glance which the New Zealander had not manifested while Rodent was his master.

"What do you want of me?" demanded Mazie.

"Zampa want white gal for he wife."

"Wretch. Leave me at once or I shall call your master."

Don, the bloodhound, bristled up at once.

The dog seemed to comprehend all that was said.

"Watch him, Don! watch him!" cried Mazie, as the New Zealander edged along the side of the wall, hoping to surprise the dog.

Don crouched down with his head between his fore paws, and fixed his flaming eyes upon the Islander.

The New Zealander had no desire to engage in an open combat with the fierce hound, and seeing that there was no possibility of taking him at a disadvantage, he retreated to the door again.

"Gal get no food now till she do as Zampa say. Dog starve, too," said the New Zealander, and he left the room, closing and securing the door behind him.

Not long after the departure of the New Zealander from the room of the imprisoned girl, she was startled by hearing a strange, rumbling sound which seemed to proceed from underneath the floor.

It was like muffled thunder, or like the growling of a number of wild beasts.

Don growled and barked, and manifested great excitement. Rushing at the door he leaped against it, and strove to dash it open with his strong paws, but the door was of massive structure and the strong bolts held it securely so that, despite the frantic assault of the hound, it yielded not an inch.

The cries of a human voice were mingled with the strange roaring, and Mazie fancied that the voice was one which she had heard before. She listened intently, with her hands clasped upon her breast to still the beating of her heart. Again the human voice came to her ears in a cry of mortal terror.

"It is the voice of the old man who made me a prisoner. What can be the meaning of these horrible sounds?" Mazie thought.

She listened again.

The moments passed, but the voice was heard no more. The roaring grew gradually less and less distinct, until it became only an indistinct, muttering growl.

Suddenly Mazie heard a shout in Zampa's voice, which proceeded from the parapet outside of the old fortress.

The voice of the New Zealander rang with an intonation of fear and surprise.

Mazie sprang to one of the narrow loopholes in the outer wall of her prison, and peered out over the desolate waste of snow. The parapet upon which she was assured Zampa had taken a position ran along the side of the fortress, above the loophole through which the girl peered, and consequently she could not see him.

At first the snow-covered steppes presented to Mazie's glance only a silent waste like a sea of white, and without evidence of life upon its monotonous expanse.

But stay—was it fancy, or had the dazzling influence of the white plain produced a hallucination in the orb of vision? Afar off she seemed to see a dark object no larger than a wolf, and as she gazed she thought it moved.

Mazie's eyes remained riveted upon this object.

No, there could be no doubt; her sight had not deceived her, something was moving upon the white sea, and that something came from the southern horizon. With absorbing interest Mazie continued to watch the dark, indistinct, moving object, and she fancied it was following the very route over which she had been brought by her captors.

CHAPTER XIII.

RODENT AND THE BEARS.

When Rodent became convinced that Zampa had purposely imprisoned him in the cellar of the ancient fortress, and that all his frantic efforts to force up the trapdoor at the head of the stairs would result only in failure, he sat down upon the steps, and bowing his head in his hands he remained for some time in deep thought.

Not long, however, did the aged villain remain in a state of despondent inactivity; rising to his feet he proceeded to grope about in the gloom of the subterranean apartment.

With great care he examined the first side of the room, but not a break or fissure in the wall was found to reward his diligent quest.

Next he passed along the second side. Its entire length was traversed, and every foot was run over by his hands, but still no opening was found.

The third side was now reached. It was the side toward the stream, at the rear of the fortress.

Rodent had advanced about one-third of the way across it, when a low muttering growl fell upon his ears, causing him to give a violent start and to pause instantly, while he strove to pierce the darkness before him with straining eyes.

As Rodent stood motionless, and with bated breath staring into the gloom, two glittering balls of fire came into view.

A moment passed, and the second pair of eyes were followed by a third; then another and another came into view, until Rodent counted six pairs of eyes roaming about in the gloom.

The terror-inspiring certainty that he was imprisoned in a den of bears filled Rodent with a fear which was absolute horror.

That the keen scent of the animals had detected his proximity he had not long any reason to doubt, for they set up a terrible roar, and when six bears roar in concert the noise is terrific.

These were the sounds which Mazie heard and wondered at.

The bears drew toward the corner in which Rodent crouched.

The gypsy drew his hunting-knife and stood upon his guard.

A moment more and a bear was close upon him. With a yell of mortal terror, Rodent struck blindly at the animal, burying his knife in his body. Then, with shouts of fear, he ran around the cellar. In a moment the bears were in pursuit.

Their terrible roars filled the room.

Dodging from side to side he continued to evade his somewhat clumsy foes.

His mind was busy. How came the bears in the cellar?

He now dodged around among the bears until he reached the portion of the side of the cellar next the water-course, and which he had not examined. Pressing his back against the wall and striking right and left at the bears with his hunting-knife, while he uttered loud shouts, Rodent, for the moment, held the savage, hunger-emboldened bears at bay.

As he edged along he suddenly came upon an opening in the wall on a level with the floor.

Instantly he dropped upon his hands and knees and plunged into this opening head first.

At the same moment one of the bears leaped upon the very spot where he had just stood.

Not an instant too soon had Rodent vacated it.

Rodent found the opening led upward through an irregular tunnel, and he hurriedly scrambled up it, heedless of where it might lead, so it offered a way of escape from the bears.

Soon he emerged upon the bank of the frozen stream, and as he drew himself up out of the tunnel his first thought was to seek Zampa and shoot him down in his tracks.

Pausing from time to time to listen—for he wished to locate the New Zealander—Rodent continued his advance toward the front of the castle until he heard Zampa upon the parapet.

Assured of the islander's presence there, Rodent crept into

the castle through the main entrance, and by means of a pair of stone steps he, too, ascended to the parapet.

He reached Zampa's side, and the first intimation the New Zealander received of his presence was by feeling the cold muzzle of the revolver against his temple.

Zampa turned quickly, and as his eyes fell upon the gypsy his face assumed the hue of death. The New Zealander fancied his last hour on earth had come, and in an instant he fell upon his knees at the feet of the man whom he had betrayed, and who now held his life in his hands.

"Move an inch and I will blow your brains out, you treacherous dog!" hissed Zampa. "Do you see the sleigh coming yonder across the plain? It contains the American and the two drivers. They have followed our trail."

"I shall need you now, for the American will make a desperate effort to wrest my prize from me. So I spare you. But, mark me, at the first sign of treachery I'll shoot you down as I would a dog. They are three to our two, but they shall never reach these ruins alive. Come with me, Zampa. I am going to test my infernal-machine upon the Yankee," said Rodent.

Mazie overheard all this, and she comprehended that the new-comers were desirous of gaining possession of her.

"What can he mean by his infernal-machine? The wretch evidently intends to murder the men whom I see in the sleigh. Oh, if I could only warn them of their danger," thought Mazie.

The next moment she saw Rodent and the New Zealander steal from the fortress, carrying between them the dangerous instrument of destruction.

They crawled across the log which bridged the moat, and planted the torpedo in the snow, just where any one who attempted to cross the bridge must run against the iron rod which, when struck, would explode the cartridge of dynamite in the cylinder out of sight under the snow.

They had not been observed by the occupants of the approaching sleigh.

All unconscious of the terrible danger which menaced them, on came the vehicle of the brave American, under the skilful guidance of the experienced Russian driver.

The sleigh reached the side of the moat a short distance to the south of the spot where the log crossed it, and as the vehicle was brought to a standstill the American leaped out of it, and, followed by the two Russians, he advanced along the side of the ditch, looking anxiously for some means by which a crossing could be made.

Soon his eyes fell upon the log.

"Come on, I see a way of getting upon the other side of the ditch. A log crosses it a little way up there. Do you not see it?" he cried.

With the American leading they now hastened toward the log.

The infernal machine lay unseen directly in their pathway.

Mazie, crouching at the loop-hole in the wall of the old ruin directly opposite, saw everything distinctly. Her eyes dilated with horror.

She remembered that the old gypsy had said that a blow or concussion upon the cylinder or iron rod would explode the torpedo. If by any means this concussion could be produced before the unconscious imperiled ones reached the infernal machine they might be saved yet.

She grasped the pistol, which she had clandestinely taken from Rodent, in her hand, and, as her eyes fell upon the polished weapon, an idea like an inspiration came to her mind.

She brought her weapon to a full cock and took a long, steady aim at the base of the iron rod where she knew the torpedo proper lay.

She breathed a silent prayer for the success of the contemplated shot, and then, with a firm, unshaking hand, she pulled the trigger.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN THE MINE.

The vulture that Kalatka sent to his friend Old Onekinhoff, the fur trader, returned to the cave with food for the sufferers next morning. But fate was against them, for during the afternoon there came a loud explosion and the whole side of the cave was blown out. Their enemy was upon them. The result was they were captured and taken back to the convoy camp. Again were the boy slaves on the road to the mines.

It had been decided that Morva, Salus, Valmer and Niven-droff Kalatka should be sent to the mines of Nerichinsk.

After a few days' further journey the mines were reached.

The exiles' guards halted near the dwelling of the inspector—an important official at the mines—and while Gantsk and Argegoff entered the official's private business department, the exiles surveyed the place where they were to undergo punishment.

A more uninviting or desolate and melancholy landscape has seldom been wrought by nature's hand.

The four exiles were marched into a small cabin, where they were obliged to submit themselves to the hands of the prisoners' barber, who shaved their hair tight to the skull.

Then they were weighed, and a description of each of them was recorded in a large book kept for the purpose. After this they were given a suit of gray and a number.

When they were attired in the prison garb, the unfortunate ones were handed over to a corporal of the prison guard.

"Here is a man or so—four of them, in fact, if you count the two boys as such—to work in your squad of miners, Maloch," said Michael Gantsk.

Maloch led the way to the inclosure at the mouth of the mines, a bell was rung, and soon a group of men, covered with tattered sheepskins, filthy and miserable in every detail of personal appearance, marched forward from the huts, driven by guards with long, heavy whips. They were the slaves of the mines. Morva and Salus were now doomed to the same terrible servitude; they had become, in very truth, "The Boy Slaves of Siberia."

The slaves of the mines advanced to the mouth of the shaft, which yawned black and dismal as the mouth of hades.

One by one they descended out of sight below the surface of the earth. The descent was accomplished by means of a ladder hundreds of feet long.

Down, down into the depths of the mines the boy slaves and their two brave companions were driven, and at last the bottom was reached.

They were in a large, irregular chamber, from which channels dug in the solid rock branched off in every direction.

Following the other slaves, our friends were driven along a passage to where a group of miners were at work.

Our friends were furnished with picks and hammers and taken into a narrow corridor. At the extremity of this they were ordered by Maloch to fall to work digging out the ore from the rock which it seamed.

Suddenly, while Maloch was not looking, Valmer gave the slave-driver a terrible thump on the head, turned on his heels, and rushed away. Maloch ordered a pursuit made, but by this time Maloch had gained quite a lead. He could see an abyss right ahead of him, and he determined to leap it rather than be recaptured and work in the mines. But something else happened.

Suddenly he felt himself grasped in a pair of powerful arms.

A man had risen up in his path.

He was a giant in strength, and Valmer could not extricate himself from his powerful grasp, although he strove to do so.

Without speaking a word, Valmer's captor bore him along for a considerable distance, but finally he paused, and, releasing Valmer, he ignited a lamp, and Valmer beheld his strange captor.

He was a man of gigantic stature, clad in sheepskins similar to those worn by the slave miners. His hair fell in matted masses over his shoulders, his beard was long and unkempt, and his great hollow eyes flashed with a strange light.

Valmer had seen the same light in the eyes of several human beings, and he felt sure that the strange, silent man was a maniac.

The giant watched him narrowly.

Suddenly he burst into a laugh.

There was something so weird and unnatural in that hollow "Ha! ha! ha!" that the guide involuntarily shuddered.

"Vengeance! vengeance!" the madman suddenly howled, and, picking up a heavy sledge, he swung it over his head.

"I am about to sacrifice you to the memory of my son, whom you worked to death in this dark hole. Prepare to die, minion of the tyrant!" cried the maniac.

CHAPTER XV.

A TERRIFIC EXPLOSION.

At the moment when Mazie pressed the trigger of her pistol, which was aimed at the infernal machine, the American and his followers had reached a point within extremely dangerous proximity to the torpedo.

Almost simultaneously with the detonation of the pistol, there was the report of a terrific explosion, and the snow was

blown upward in a blinding sheet of white in the faces of the American's party, while the torpedo, shivered into a thousand missiles of destruction, flew all around them.

To Rodent and Zampa, the New Zealander, the explosion was as great a surprise as it was to the American.

"By the gods! that was a narrow escape! The infernal gypsy is at the bottom of this, I'll stake my life. The old rascal is in this old ruin, I am convinced, and we must storm his fort and rescue the girl I am in search of," said the American.

"See, there are men on the outer walls of the ruin!" cried one of the Russians.

Perkins and the other gazed at the ruin.

The heads of Rodent and the Pacific Islander came into view over the wall of the parapet.

"It's true, and one is the old gypsy himself, and, if I mistake not, the other is the wild-looking man of the dark face and long hair, who strangled me the night Rodent left our camp," said Perkins.

"If I could get a shot at the wretch who tried to murder me I would be most happy."

Neither of the stupid fellows volunteered any information or offered any suggestion.

"Just let me reflect a moment. I guess I can study out some Yankee scheme to circumvent these foreigners," said Perkins.

He walked slowly back to the sleigh, and seating himself, he took from his pocket a Yankee jack-knife, and finding a splinter of wood, he began to whittle.

"I have it!" Perkins exclaimed, closing his jack-knife and throwing down the bit of wood. "Detach the horses from the sleigh, and we will push it forward to the brink of the moat, sheltering ourselves behind it. Then, when we get close up to the moat, we will purposely draw the fire of the gypsy's rifle, and the moment it is discharged we will make a rush and get under the battlements before he can reload. We must trust to our agility in dodging to escape the harpoons of the strange creature who hurls them so skillfully," said the American.

His instructions were at once obeyed, and the sleigh was pushed up to the edge of the moat.

When it had reached this point, Perkins took off his hat and coat and prepared a "dummy" by placing the hat and garment upon a stick, and cautiously elevating it over the rear of the sleigh. The moment it came in sight Rodent fired, just as Perkins supposed he would do, and dropping the decoy, the American rushed forward, closely followed by the two Russians.

The log over the moat was crossed, and the three men gained a position under the battlement, out of range of those upon it. Strangely enough, not a single harpoon had been hurled at them, for Zampa was no longer on the battlement.

Zampa had looked back over the white plains and seen two sleigh-loads of a tribe which belonged in the far north, named Tchouktchis, and he happened to be friends with them. He hastened to meet them, unknown to Rodent. They greeted him warmly and he told them he had a maiden that he wished to kidnap from the place. After telling part of his story, they consented to help him and take both Zampa and his captive to their northern settlement. Zampa led them to Mazie's room and they seized her and carried her to one of their sleighs without being discovered by Rodent or the American, who were fighting on the other side of the ruin.

The speed with which the reindeer carried them along soon placed the sleigh of the natives out of sight of the ruin.

The journey to the land of the Tchouktchis was a long one, but it was eventually accomplished.

One evening the captors of Mazie arrived upon the coast of the Bay of Kolioutchine.

A village of the fixed Tchouktchis, who dwell upon the borders of the sea, and are distinct from the nomad or reindeer Tchouktchis, was reached.

The arrival of the kamaka was the occasion of great rejoicing, and Zampa's white prisoner attracted great attention.

The kamaka's wives were at first disposed to treat Mazie rather rudely, for they supposed she had been brought home by their lord and master to become his wife, and they quite naturally resented such a proceeding.

Upon learning she was the property of Zampa, and was to be his wife, the dusky beauties of the kamaka's household became quite friendly, and as Mazie was for the time placed in their care, she was not ill-treated.

CHAPTER XVI.

RODENT A PRISONER.

The report of Mazie's pistol, when she fired upon the New Zealander and the Arctic natives, startled Rodent, and a doubt as to the islander's motive in leaving him so suddenly crossed his mind.

The gypsy would no doubt have hastened at once from the parapet with the intention of ascertaining the reason of the pistol shot, but he dared not leave the approach to the ruin undefended.

But it did him no good, as Perkins gained admission to the ruin and came upon the gypsy so suddenly as to fairly knock him off his feet.

"Surrender, you old traitor!" cried the American, as he discovered Rodent at the head of the stairs.

He determined to throw off all semblance of any than his real purpose, for he realized that further attempt to disguise it was useless.

"By what authority do you demand my surrender?" answered the gypsy.

"By the authority of all honest men to arrest would-be murderers and abductors of helpless maidens."

"I am a Russian citizen. Beware how you attempt to take the law into your own hands."

"I care not if you were the Czar himself."

"What is it you wish of me?"

"I want the girl called Mazie, whom you kidnapped from the convoy camp."

"I did not kidnap her."

"Well, you took her away against her will. Come, let us have no fooling about it."

"She is within that room," pointing to the door of Mazie's recent prison.

Perkins threw open the door.

Of course the room was empty.

"Now, by Heavens, you die!" cried Perkins, believing the gypsy was still trifling with him.

"No, no; I swear I told you the truth. I left the girl locked in that room. If she is not there I know not where she is. You saw the man with me upon the battlement. He left me suddenly, and if the girl is missing, he is at the bottom of the abduction. He is a treacherous, half-civilized New Zealander, and he has taken a fancy to the girl's pretty face."

The manner in which this was said satisfied the American of the truth of the statement.

At that moment the bloodhound came himself forward and licked the American's hand.

"Search the house, men," and as he spoke Perkins pushed Rodent into the prison which had been occupied by Mazie, and closed the heavy door, securing it upon him.

The ancient ruin was searched, and in the rear the tracks in the snow at once solved the mystery of Mazie's disappearance.

"Reindeer!" exclaimed one of the Russians.

"Two teams have been here. See, here is the same small footprint we saw in the snow at the camp of the gypsy. The girl has been carried off in one of the sleighs drawn by reindeer," said the other Russian.

"True. She is leading us a long chase. The reindeer tracks lead to the north. Who can have visited the old ruin with teams of reindeer? They must come from the far north," said the American.

"I think from the tracks of the sleighs that they are those used by the native tribes of the far north," volunteered one of the Russians.

"Then the girl I seek is in the power of the savage Pacific Islander of whom the gypsy told us. She is in greater danger now than before. The wretch who attempted my murder would have no mercy upon a defenseless woman," said the American.

They had discovered the team which Rodent had appropriated while they were making a search of the castle, and the Russian driver was made happy thereby.

Perkins made up his mind to take his Russian driver and the bloodhound and start on the track of Mazie's kidnappers. The Russian was perfectly willing to go, so they started off.

CHAPTER XVII.

SALUS' PLANS.

The Vulture King and the boy slaves trembled for their friend Valmer. If he escaped falling over the abyss into the underground lake at the extremity of the dark passage down

which he rushed, they doubted not that Maloch would punish him terribly.

After a short lapse of time Maloch and the other guards who had gone in pursuit of Valmer returned.

"He rushed over the abyss. We have lost a good strong miner, though it would have taken a good use of the knout to break him to the work," said Maloch.

Michael Gantsk and Argegoff now left the mines.

At night the slave-miners are permitted to ascend to the surface of the earth.

The slaves of the mines sleep in prison-like barracks, and are always guarded.

The first night in the miners' barracks was a restless one to the new slaves of the Czar. The boys could not sleep, their brains burned, and there was a constant humming in their ears.

Kalatka suffered even more than the two vigorous youths. Morning, following that long, feverish night, which was never to be forgotten, dawned at last. The slaves were marched back to the mines.

As they were passing the office of the superintendent, the inspector came out and called, in a loud voice:

"Number six hundred and seventeen!"

This was Salus Vorviski's number.

"Here!" answered the lad.

"Step this way."

Salus followed the inspector into his office.

The squad of miners moved on.

Morva and Kalatka descended into the mine.

The toil of another day began.

The hours passed.

Midday came, and Salus had not come to the mine.

The boy's two friends wondered what had become of him.

The day passed and night came, yet the friends of Salus saw him no more.

That night the boy slave and his father were, if possible, more miserable than they had been the first evening.

As Morva lay that night tossing in his bunk, unable to sleep, he thought of the mysterious document which had been given to him by Martin Ludyer the night before his death.

The words of Ludyer in substance were, that he was only to open the letter when his life was about to be sacrificed, as the man Ludyer had prophesied it would be, and that it would be of great service to him, while it would doom many to death or exile. All this Morva recalled.

Throughout his captivity he had kept possession of this document, having placed it between the linings of his boot.

* * * * *

Meantime, what had become of Salus, and how fared he?

"Boy, I understand you are educated?" said the inspector, when Salus followed him to the office.

"Yes, sir; I was considered a fair scholar for my age."

"That is well. I think I can give you work in my office here, which will prove more congenial than the toil of the mines."

"I trust you will find me grateful for your kindness in relieving me of the drudgery of the mine."

"Your labor in the office is worth more than it would be in the mine. You would not accomplish much as a miner. You see I am only acting for my own interests in this matter," and Inspector Kipkad smiled shrewdly.

"Then may you profit by my labor even more than you expect to do," answered Salus, pleasantly. Salus was really an excellent penman, a skillful accountant, and he had no difficulty in discharging the duties of the inspector's clerk, into the mysteries of which office he was directly initiated.

According to the rules of the mines, no slave-miner could leave the mines during the hours of toil, without an order or permit signed by the inspector. But when provided with one of these official documents, upon its presentation at any time to the guard at the mouth of the mines, the bearer would be allowed to pass.

Salus was familiar with this rule of the mines, and the very first day of his clerkship in the office of the inspector, he began to practice signing the inspector's name.

Only a few days elapsed before Salus had acquired so great a proficiency in imitating the signature of the inspector, that he felt confident that he could produce a copy of his name which would be a perfect fac-simile.

An opportunity occurred one day to test the perfection of his imitation.

It was Salus' duty to inclose all passes which the inspector signed, in an envelope, and write upon it the number and description of the exile for whose use it was issued.

Upon the day in question, Salus, instead of inclosing the

pass which had been properly signed by the inspector, substituted one which he had signed himself with the inspector's name.

The forgery, for such it was, was not detected.

"Now if I could succeed in getting Morva and his father out of the mines during the early part of the day, they might possibly succeed in stealing away, and their escape would not be known until the following morning when the slaves of the mine are marched forth to their daily toil," thought Salus.

It was at the hour of sunset that Salus, his duties for the day concluded, sat in the door of the inspector's office, reflecting upon the situation, as we have stated. His eyes were turned toward the south with a longing gaze. His thoughts were of some means of reaching his distant home.

The youth raised his eyes heavenward.

As his eyes swept the azure dome of the sky he started violently at the sight of a flock of strange, gigantic birds circling about high in the air.

"They are vultures!" he exclaimed.

To-night, as he stood watching the vultures in the sky, the bell at the mines sounded the hour which released the slaves from their toil for the day.

Soon he saw the exile miners marching out of the inclosure surrounding the opening of the shaft, and taking their way toward the barracks guarded by a score of gendarmes.

Among the unfortunates he distinguished the persons of Morva and his father, the Vulture King of the Baikals.

Salus kept his eyes fixed on the Vulture King, hoping that the old bird-trainer might chance to look upward, and see the vultures circling in the sky.

The doors of the barracks were almost reached when Salus saw Morva, who marched beside his father, place his hand upon the latter's shoulder, and point toward the birds wheeling about high over their heads. The Vulture King glanced upward and saw them.

That same night, when the inhabitants of the barracks were wrapped in the profound sleep of exhaustion, Kalatka raised the narrow window at the head of his bunk and looked forth.

The sky was destitute of clouds.

The full moon rendered the night almost as light as the day.

He waited in silence for a moment, when there came to his ears the welcome shriek of a vulture.

Never had music sounded so sweetly in his ears as did that discordant cry of the Asiatic bird of prey.

A moment or so elapsed, and then from the direction of the rear of the barracks, in which he could see but a short distance, came the cry a second time, and directly a huge bird came flapping over the roof of the barracks, and settled down upon the stone window-sill at Kalatka's side.

It was Rover, the gigantic message-carrying vulture.

Kalatka caressed the bird affectionately.

While doing this the Vulture King was searching the vulture.

He hoped to find upon it some message.

He was not disappointed.

The message-carrier had brought him a letter.

Hastily Kalatka tore it open.

The letter was written on parchment made from the inner bark of the birch tree.

Kalatka spread it out, and by the light of the moon he was about to read it, but he had not mastered a single word of its contents, when the dark form of a man who had for several minutes been creeping along the wall of the barracks, suddenly arose from underneath the window, and snatched the message from Kalatka's hand, instantly disappearing.

Scarcely a moment had passed after the disappearance of the man who had stolen the vulture's message, when Kalatka cried, in a low voice:

"At him, Rover! Follow—follow!"

Instantly the huge bird darted after the man who had vanished with the message.

A moment later there was a cry of a human voice from the rear of the barracks, but although Kalatka strained his neck afar out of the window he could see nothing.

The cry which reached the ears of Kalatka was one of mortal agony.

The Vulture King expected to hear it repeated, but it was not.

A moment passed.

A second moment elapsed.

A third one of these minute-divisions of time went by, and still all was profound silence, when suddenly the white, frightened face of Salus Vorviski appeared before him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

VALMER'S ESCAPE.

The situation in which Valmer found himself—confronted by the gigantic miner, of whose madness there could be no doubt, and who swung the sledge over his head threatening to crush his skull—was sufficiently terrible to frighten the bravest.

The instant the maniac swung the sledge on high, and as it was about to be brought down upon him, he lowered his head and shot forward like a battering-ram, striking the maniac full in the pit of the stomach, driving all the breath out of his body and doubling him up like a jack-knife.

Before the maniac could regain his feet, Valmer leaped upon him and seized him by the throat.

The madman struggled violently, but his frantic efforts were in vain, the Tartar had him at a disadvantage.

"You were wrong, my friend. You took me for another. I never injured you or your son; I am only a poor exile, doomed to slave my life away in the mines. You cannot wish to harm me," he said.

The madman looked up at Valmer wonderingly.

"Then you are not one of the fiends of the mine. You are only a slave, as I was, and my son, whom they worked to death. I thought you were one of the fiends, but now I see I was wrong. Why don't you run away? I ran away, and now I am the king of darkness. You are welcome to my kingdom. Ha! ha! ha! You wish food and drink? You shall have both."

Valmer had released the maniac and he arose to his feet.

He no longer wished to do the guide an injury.

To the guide's surprise, he produced food from a hollow in the wall.

The guide and the maniac miner sat down and partook of the food.

They conversed together.

After a while the madman took Valmer by the hand and showed him around the cave. It was a most extensive affair. At the far end of the cave there was a lake, and the madman assured Valmer that it had an outlet which ran out into the outside world.

Valmer formed a plan of escape in his mind and proposed it to the madman.

He heartily consented and so the next day they built a raft. When it was finished Valmer got aboard and set out, the madman absolutely refusing to leave his underground retreat.

The raft, after some time, entered the stream and drifted on. In the course of time it passed out into the sunlight.

Valmer let it drift on until he came to a place where it was easy to land, and he poled the raft up to the bank and stepped ashore.

The surface of the country was very broken and marshy, and quite different from that in the neighborhood of the mines.

Valmer concluded that he was some considerable distance from the underground prison.

What should he do next?

Valmer asked himself this question.

He was powerless to aid his fellow-exiles. There was only one thing to do, and that was not easy of accomplishment. He must make his way back to the Baikals—to his home by adoption among the Buriats.

Many weary miles were to be traversed.

His clothing would betray him.

He determined to travel only at night when in an open country, or when his course led him near any postal or relay stations along the few principal routes of travel across Siberia.

As the desolate country in which he found himself was far removed from any of the frequented trails, Valmer took the risk of chance discovery by any wandering huntsman and journeyed on until nightfall.

The labor of the day had been most arduous, and the strain upon the guide's nerves caused him to forget his physical weariness.

The solitary wayfarer had reached the borders of a level plain which, at the point where the marshy land through which his journey had thus far lay ended, was wooded by stunted trees, and he had just emerged from these when a shadow fell across his path.

The defenseless escaping exile leaped back among the trees.

Valmer's first and most natural impulse was to take to his heels, for the shadow was that of a man.

It was too late to seek safety in flight, for, a moment later, he knew he had been discovered.

CHAPTER XIX.

PERKINS AND MAZIE.

We left Perkins and his Russian companion following the trail of the reindeer.

The snow-storm had obliterated the trail, not a trace of it remained to guide them, and it seemed as though their journey had come to an enforced end.

The little native dog-driver was as completely at fault as his employer.

Don, the bloodhound, with his keen scent, could not, in this case, find the lost trail.

Suddenly, while they were still despondently scraping away the snow, the north wind wafted to their ears the faint, distressed cry of a human creature.

They discontinued their work and paused to listen.

The wailing cry was repeated, again and again.

"It is the voice of a man, and he is in trouble," said the Russian.

"It would appear so. Let us see if we can find him," answered the American.

So they went in the direction of the cries, and after searching for some time found an overturned dog-sleigh half buried in the snow and ice.

Under the sleigh, weighed down by the weight of snow and ice, was a man of seventy or thereabouts. Perkins and the Russian succeeded in getting the sleigh and snow off the man's breast. But he could not get on his feet, because his leg had been broken. Now, Perkins was somewhat of a doctor, and motioning to the man that he could fix his leg, the man told him to go ahead. Perkins was as good as his word and set the man's leg.

The man explained he was a medicine man of a tribe farther north, and Perkins suggested that he get in the sleigh and direct them to his home, as the dogs of the native's sleigh had broken loose and run away and were nowhere in sight.

The old man was delighted with the offer and readily accepted.

So they lifted him into their sleigh and started off for the native's village.

Now, it happened this man belonged to the very tribe to which Zampa, the New Zealander, had carried Mazie.

The arrival of the medicine man was hailed with delight by the natives. The old man introduced Perkins to the natives as a great medicine man in his own country and showed them how he had fixed his leg.

It happened that Zampa was away on a seal hunt with a party of natives when Perkins' party arrived.

Mazie, however, had witnessed the arrival of the medicine man and his white friends from the door of the chief's hut, and she had recognized the American as the same man whom she had saved from Rodent's infernal machine.

The maiden was more than ever convinced that he was in search of her, and she determined to make her presence known. She was just about to rush from the hut and throw herself upon the American's protection when the chief approached and, pushing her back into the hut, gave his wives the order to guard her.

Perkins had not seen Mazie, but the sharp-eyed Russian had discovered her, and he saw the native chief push her back into the hut.

Not a word said he then.

When night came and they were alone in their hut, the Russian said to the American:

"She is here!"

"Who?"

"The girl you seek."

"How know you this?"

"I have seen her."

"But you never saw the girl I seek before."

"I saw a white boy appear at the door of a hut."

"And what become of the white youth?"

"The chief of the tribe pushed the white youth back out of sight just as he or she—for I knew by her appearance she was a girl in male attire—seemed about to start toward us."

"It must be the girl I seek."

"I do not doubt it."

"We must steal from the village this night, taking the girl with us, and before morning dawns we must be well on our journey to the south."

When the village became silent, and the hour was such as might be supposed to find the natives all asleep, the Russian harnessed the dogs and fastened them to the sleigh.

This done, he pointed out to the American the hut in the door of which he had seen the white girl.

Perkins silently approached it.

Mazie was in the rear apartment wide awake. The wives of the chief were in the front part of the hut, which was divided in the center by a partition of reindeer hide.

Perkins reached the rear of the hut, and drawing his knife he cut a slit in the skin which formed its wall. Mazie heard the sound made by the knife.

In a moment she was upon her feet. Perkins enlarged the opening in the rear wall of the hut.

In a moment he placed his lips to the aperture and made a faint sound.

Mazie in a whisper asked:

"Are you the white stranger?"

"I am. You are a prisoner. I am here to rescue you. Make no sound, and I will cut the tent so you can come out."

Perkins did so.

A moment later the white girl was standing by his side.

Despite her male attire, Perkins knew she was a girl.

"Follow me, and I will explain everything when we reach a place of safety," said the American, anticipating any question that Mazie might have been disposed to ask.

They reached the sledge, and taking their places in it, they were about to start to leave the village, when the sound of approaching voices came to their ears.

"Oh, we are lost! The New Zealander is returning. He has been away on a hunt," said Mazie, in a hurried whisper.

The American's sledge was drawn up in the rear of the hut which had been assigned to his use, and the voices came from a direction in front of this hut.

As yet they were hidden from the view of those who were approaching.

The New Zealander's party was close at hand. A moment later he strode by the front of the tent, followed by a party of natives.

Just at that inopportune moment one of the dogs belonging to the American's team began to bark loudly.

In an instant the New Zealander and his followers turned and came directly toward our friends.

Don, the bloodhound, had, of course, never deserted the American, and when Mazie came from the tent the intelligent brute had manifested every sign of joy.

The hound remembered Zampa as his enemy and he gave vent to a deep growl.

An instant later the New Zealander turned the corner of the tent and he saw the group crouching there.

The sight took the New Zealander by surprise.

He saw the man whom he had tried to kill and the white girl whom he had sworn to make his wife standing hand-in-hand.

Like lightning, the truth, that his prey was about to be taken from him, dawned upon his mind, and with a yell of rage he drew a harpoon and hurled the deadly weapon full at the head of the American.

At the same instant Perkins, whose eyes were fixed upon the savage from the Pacific Isles, dropped to the ground and the harpoon whistled by over his prostrate form.

As the harpoon flew from the New Zealander's hand the bloodhound made a terrific leap and fastened his fangs in his throat.

The fierce dog dragged him to the ground, and an awful struggle followed.

The natives rushed upon the dog and beat him with their spears, striving to make him release the New Zealander, but the dog clung to the savage's throat with the tenacity peculiar to his breed, and when at last he was made to relinquish his hold the man was stone dead.

Zampa, the strangler of the Death League, would never commit another crime on this earth.

CHAPTER XX.

RUNNING FOR LIFE.

To explain clearly to the reader what is to follow, let us return to Salus Vorviski, whom we left watching the vulture in the sky, and hoping that Kalatka would observe the bird before he entered the exil mines' quarters.

The gratification of the young exile when he saw that Kalatka did see and recognize the huge bird was most sincere. But when Kalatka entered the barracks and the vulture, after wheeling about in the sky, flew away to the south until he became a mere dark speck upon the sky, and finally vanished in the mysterious regions where earth and sky seemed to

blend, at the horizon, he experienced a feeling of disappointment.

Salus could not sleep that night.

Salus found himself standing at the door of the inspector's office after an hour or so of vainly tossing about, striving to get to sleep.

Suddenly the silence of the night was broken.

Upon the stillness fell a strange, shrill call.

It reached the ears of the listening boy, and he at once recognized the sound.

It was repeated.

He expected to see Kalatka's strange cry answered by the appearance of his vultures.

In this, as the reader knows, he was not disappointed, for he saw Rover, the trained message-carrying vulture, when the educated bird flew down to the window of the barracks where Kalatka was stationed.

Indeed, Salus saw the vulture flying from the south some moments before he reached the window of the barracks, and at about the same time he noticed the figure of a man outlined against the sky upon the summit of a hillock a hundred yards or more distant.

The man seemed to have seen the vulture at about the same time that the bird became visible to Salus, and as he noticed that the bird flew toward the barracks, as if in answer to the cry of the Vulture King, which he had heard also, he started upon a run for the same building.

As the vulture swooped down and alighted upon the window-sill, the strange man had gained a position almost underneath it and, as he turned his face so that the light of the moon fell full upon it, Salus, who was by this time quite near him, though still hidden by the shadows, saw his face distinctly.

The man was Argegoff, the spy.

At the sight of the face of this evil man Salus started. He knew that he was there to thwart any good that might come to Kalatka from his calling his vulture.

The youth determined to block Argegoff's game if it were possible to do so.

It was a moment later that Argegoff arose and snatched the message brought by the vulture from the hand of the Vulture King, before he had read a word of it, and with it in his grasp vanished behind the barracks.

The same moment Salus, who had seen the act of the spy in stealing the message, rushed after him, but the vulture, which the reader will remember Kalatka had set upon the thief, was still more swift than the boy, and when Salus reached the rear of the barracks he saw Argegoff engaged in defending himself against the fierce bird, which flew at him with great fury.

The spy had dropped the message from his hand in the combat with the vulture, and Salus saw it upon the ground.

Salus had approached behind Argegoff, and as the spy's entire attention was taken up with the bird, he had not seen the lad coming from the rear.

Thus it was that, unseen by the spy, Salus picked up the message which the vulture had brought.

The message safe in his possession, Salus seized a heavy club which chanced to be near at hand and brought it down upon Argegoff's head with all his strength.

The blow felled the spy to the ground, and without pausing to see whether he was fatally injured or not, Salus ran toward the window at which the Vulture King still remained.

As the young exile turned the corner of the barracks he narrowly escaped discovery by two guards, who had been alarmed by Argegoff's cries of terror, occasioned by the attack of the vulture.

"Here is the message Argegoff stole from you a moment ago. I narrowly escaped discovery by the guards, and although I knocked the spy senseless to the earth, he may soon recover and be upon us. Read the message and then give it to me and I will destroy it so that no one will ever know its contents," said Salus, giving Kalatka the parchment.

Hastily Kalatka read it.

When he had concluded its perusal he handed it to Salus.

"Good news! Our——" he began.

"Hush! hush!" whispered Salus, "the guards are coming. I must away before they see me. I'll read it for myself," and thrusting the message into his bosom, Salus crept away among the shadows, while the Vulture King left the window and crept back to the side of Morva, who, worn out with the toil of the day, had fallen asleep.

In the morning Kalatka informed Morva of all that had taken place the previous night.

"And the message, what did it say?" asked Morva, eagerly.

"It was from Ivan, Valmer's trusty lieutenant."

"Yes! yes!" and Morva started up.

"He is hovering about in the neighborhood, and if there is any possible chance he will aid us to escape. If we could get outside of the lines we would not stop again until we fell dead in our tracks. We might better have remained and perished in the cave than lead this awful life," said Kalatka.

"And did you send an answer?"

"No, my son; but rest assured that Salus will find a way to do so when he has read the letter."

Meanwhile, Salus had read the letter from Ivan, and after reflecting for some time, the lad came to the determination to make one desperate and bold attempt to get his friends outside of the guards' lines.

For a long time the inspector had been contemplating detailing a party of miners to cut and stack a mass of fuel logs which lay just a short distance outside of the guarded limits of the town.

Salus determined to forge an order detailing men for this work and, of course, Kalatka and Morva were to be among the number.

The following day Salus wrote the order detailing four of the exile miners to chop the logs without the guarded limits of the town, and in indicating the numbers by which, as we have mentioned, the exiles were known, he wrote those of Kalatka and Morva.

As the result of a prolonged debauch, the inspector was ill that day, and he did not leave his room at all, so Salus had the office to himself for the entire day.

All the circumstances seemed favorable to the projected escape.

Michael Gantsk had disappeared, and Salus knew not what had become of him. The mysterious absence of the boy spy of the Third Section caused him some uneasiness, for he fully appreciated the extreme cunning of the gypsy lad, and he thought perhaps his absence was only a trick to lull the boy slaves into fancied security so that they might be tempted to try to escape.

The log-heap to which the exiles were conducted was at least three-quarters of a verst, according to Russian measurement, from the limits of the mining hamlet.

A level plain lay between.

In the office of the inspector, and upon the side toward the plain, was a large window which commanded a view of the logs. Before this window Salus stationed himself.

He watched the exiles as they crossed the white space, and he saw them reach the logs.

Salus wondered how the exiles would give the guards the slip, yet that they would succeed in doing so he did not doubt.

Salus watched the exiles through the glass for some time, but still there was no manifestation of an unusual character on their part.

For a moment he laid aside the glass.

The entrance into the office of one of the drivers from the mine, who came for a diagram left by the engineer, caused this interruption in his watch.

When the man left the room Salus resumed his watch through the glass again.

He gave a quick start.

He saw a number of dark forms moving on the snow.

They were horsemen. There could be no doubt.

Salus little doubted that the horsemen were Ivan and his party.

Slowly, as it seemed to the anxious observer, they came nearer.

As the distance grew less and less, Salus' suspicion became almost a positive certainty.

The garb of the horsemen was the picturesque costume of the Tartars.

Salus had for some time neglected to watch the exiles at work chopping the logs.

He now dropped his glass upon them.

As he did so the faint sound of a discharged gun came to his ears.

Scarcely had the report ceased to reverberate when, mingled with the detonation, came the shriek of a man borne upon the wind, which was favorable; although faint, of course, it was heard by Salus.

At the same time he saw the Vulture King, through his powerful glass, throw up his hands and fall to the earth, while Morva, who with his father had been running from the log-heap, kept on toward the horsemen, who were now dashing forward at full speed.

"My heaven!" exclaimed Salus, as he saw Kalatka fall,

"have they killed Morva's father? Heavens, this is terrible! Ah, now they are in pursuit of Morva! How the brave boy leaps forward! Good! good! he is going on his pursuers. The horsemen are nearing him. Now they beckon to him, and they are giving all the signs of friendship. It is now a race for life. The gendarmes are swift runners, too. Oh! Morva has stumbled. There, he is up again, but the gendarmes have gained upon him. Why do not the Tartars ride faster?"

As yet none of the guards about the hamlet had noticed what was taking place afar out upon the plain.

"Heavens!" suddenly cried Salus, "one of the gendarmes has stopped. He has raised his rifle to his shoulder, and is taking aim at Morva. Horror! horror! He is about to shoot the boy down in his tracks."

CHAPTER XXI.

VALMER MEETS HIS FRIENDS.

When the shadow fell across Valmer's path, his first impulse was to run away into the brush. But he had been discovered.

"Halt!" commanded a stern voice, and Valmer saw before him a man attired in the garb of a courier or mail-carrier, and two tall mounted gendarmes accompanied him.

One of the gendarmes it was who commanded Valmer to halt.

The command was rendered more impressive by a loaded carbine aimed full at the guide's head.

"Well?" said Valmer, laconically.

"Who are you?" was the gendarme's first question.

Valmer's garb betrayed him.

"I am, as you see—," with a deprecating motion, indicating the exile garb.

"Then you are an escaped exile from the mine?"

"I am."

"I arrest you."

"I am unarmed; I am powerless to resist you."

"Come, Sachoff, help me to bind the fellow," and, so saying, the gendarme threw himself from his horse, as did his comrade.

"Give me some things from your pack; I saw you have some yesterday, Nicholas," said one of the gendarmes, addressing the courier.

The gendarme who was speaking turned toward the courier. In doing so he "lost the drop" on Valmer, as his carbine no longer covered him.

Gendarme number two placed his hand on Valmer's arm, when suddenly the guide's left fist shot forward, striking the man in the face and sending him sprawling upon the ground.

Instantly Valmer made a flying leap over his body, and seizing his horse by the bit, he sprang into the saddle just vacated by the gendarme, and with a wild Tartar yell he dashed away.

But at this moment the other gendarme turned and discharged his carbine at Valmer.

The guide threw himself over the side of his horse so that only his left hand, which clutched the horse's mane, and his left foot thrown over the steed's flank, were in view.

The bullet whistled harmlessly over his head.

Instantly the gendarme, who still retained possession of his horse, and the courier started in pursuit.

On, on dashed pursuer and pursued.

A rise of ground, forming a ridge, was just in front of Valmer.

He was but a moment in reaching its summit, and the next he plunged over it, and vanished from sight as suddenly as though the earth had opened and swallowed both horse and rider.

"Where has he gone?"

"What has become of him?"

"Has he fallen into a pit?"

These several questions Valmer's pursuers asked each other. A brief space of time and the summit of the ridge over which Valmer had vanished was reached.

A wonderful surprise awaited the eager man-hunters.

Let us see what Fate had in store as a reward for these mercenary man-hunters.

When Valmer vanished over the ridge he plunged down a steep and rugged descent, which tried his horsemanship to the utmost to keep his seat in the saddle.

A moment later he was in the midst of a band of strange, wild-looking horsemen, who were at the base of the hill.

With fierce cries and uplifted spears a dozen of these nomads of the north came dashing toward Valmer.

In an instant the guide would have been impaled on more than one of those long, heavy battle-spears had not the foremost of the wild horsemen suddenly halted, and whirling his horse around waved his spear in the faces of his followers, causing their horses to rear backward and pause in their headlong charge.

"Back! back!" he shouted in a ringing tone. "Are you blind? He is our chief—Valmer, the Tartar!"

"Valmer! Valmer! Ho! Ho!" shouted the Tartars.

The next moment Valmer grasped the hand of the man who had been the first to recognize him.

"Ivan, my trusty friend. Heaven be praised for this lucky meeting!" said Valmer.

"Thank goodness I have found you at last!" said the faithful Ivan.

Scarcely had Valmer and his friends time to exchange greetings when the sound of his onrushing pursuers came to Valmer's ears.

"I am pursued by a gendarme and a mounted courier!" cried Valmer.

"The pursuit will soon end," Ivan cried.

"Here, my brothers, be ready to receive the foes of our chief," he went on, addressing the men who clustered around.

The Tartars gave vent to expressions indicative of their satisfaction at having an opportunity to retaliate upon Valmer's foes.

They quickly ranged themselves at the base of the ridge with spears couchant, and in readiness to transfix Valmer's foes.

Almost immediately the gendarme and the courier came tearing over the hillock at full speed.

In an instant—like a flash of lightning—the danger into which they had rushed dawned upon the doomed men.

Frantically both the gendarme and the courier strove to arrest the onward course of their steeds.

In vain were all their frenzied efforts.

The impetus of the rush down the hill could not be quickly overcome.

Plunging and rearing 'neath the fierce jerks upon the bits to which their riders subjected them, the horses rushed straight upon the couchant spears.

There was a shock.

Then two terrified screams.

An instant, and the two horses and their riders were rolling in the snow.

The steeds staggered to their feet, but the riders never rose again.

The spears of the Tartars had done their deadly work.

Valmer said nothing about it.

Hurriedly, however, Valmer explained all that had occurred since his parting with Ivan in the cave in the Baikals.

A consultation followed.

To Valmer's satisfaction he learned that Ivan had returned to the cave in the Baikals after Kalatka's capture and secured the vultures and Bruno, the bear.

Further, Ivan stated that the trained message-carrying vulture, known by the name of Rover, was at that moment with the party.

"We will use him to send Kalatka word that friends are near," said Valmer.

"Can the vulture reach him?" asked Ivan.

"I hope so," was the answer.

"Kalatka is his master, and if he sees the bird in the sky the Vulture King will know how to bring him within reach, I presume," said Ivan.

"Yes, if Providence only guides the bird aright."

"Then let us lose no time."

"Bring the bird forth."

"Yes," and Ivan strode away.

Valmer proceeded to write the message.

It was fastened upon the bird and he was set at liberty.

How this message came into Kalatka's hands the reader already knows.

The day following the release of the vulture the bird returned.

Eagerly Valmer and Ivan examined him to see if the message had been removed.

It was with great satisfaction that they found it was gone.

They had faith to believe that it had been removed by the Vulture King.

The necessary order being given, the party advanced.

The band moved forward cautiously.

The Tartars had not proceeded far when suddenly Valmer called Ivan's attention to a dark object, which was shooting

along over the steppe at a rapid pace and, coming from the south, was shaping its course toward the settlement at the mine.

"Ha! It is a narter or sleigh for one person, drawn by a team of reindeer. Perhaps it is some traveler or fur-trader from the far north," answered Ivan.

"I can see now that it is as you say, but the person in the sleigh is small—a mere boy, I should say. Ivan, I have a suspicion. May not the occupant of that sleigh be the boy spy, Michael Gantsk?"

"It is possible. See, he has paused, and seems to have discovered us. He is trying to make out who we are. I wonder if we could possibly catch up with him?" said Ivan.

"No, no; the attempt would be useless. Our horses would only be worn out for naught."

A few moments more and the Tartars came in sight of the log-heap which we mentioned in a preceding chapter.

They saw men at work at the log-pile.

"By all the fates, there are exiles out on the plain working under guard!" exclaimed Valmer.

"Yes, there are four of them. I can distinguish them by their garb, and there are two armed gendarmes," the guide continued.

"Forward, all, at full speed! Two of the exiles are running toward us. I believe they are Kalatka and Morva!" shouted Valmer.

The party dashed forward at increased speed.

But at the same time between them and the log-heap shot the sleigh which they had noticed before. The course of the sleigh was shaped so as to intercept the escaping exiles.

Had Valmer known that Michael Gantsk was in this sleigh with a loaded carbine, and that he had guessed what had occurred—the breaking away from their guards of the Vulture King and his son, and that the gypsy intended to intercept the exiles and shoot them if necessary—he would have experienced great anxiety.

A moment later Valmer saw Kalatka fall, and the report of the gendarme's gun reached his ears as it had those of Salus'. The Tartars were coming on at full speed all this time.

"I believe that fellow in the sleigh means to head off Morva. Heaven grant that it may turn out that they have not slain his father. The boy is a fine runner. He will soon be beyond rifle range of the gendarme. Horror! the wretch is about to shoot at the boy!" Thus Valmer commented as he saw what we have already related as witnessed by Salus from the window of the inspector's office.

CHAPTER XXII.

PURSUED.

Let us now return to Mazie and Perkins, the American, and follow their fortunes for a time.

When the natives succeeded in tearing Don, the bloodhound, from off his victim, and they saw that Zampa, the New Zealander, was really dead, they set up a yell of rage, and, brandishing their seal-killing spears, they advanced menacingly upon the American's party.

That they would have made a determined assault upon Mazie's rescuers, bent as they were upon taking revenge for Zampa's death, there can be but little doubt had not Soutuchis, the sorcerer, at that moment appeared at the door of his hut.

"Stop! stop!" he shouted. "Harm not those people! They are the friends of Soutuchis, your caman. One is a great caman of the white race from beyond the sea. He has saved Soutuchis' life, and if they are harmed the spirits of the north have revealed it to Soutuchis that evil will come upon all of our tribe and spirits of darkness take possession of our land."

At this threatening command the natives paused in their advance upon the American.

One of the natives turned to the sorcerer and, bowing low, he said:

"Great caman of the Tchouktchis, the dog of the white man has slain Zampa, the friend of our kamaka. Our kamaka will be angry, and it is the custom of our tribe to shed blood for blood. Will not the great caman consult the spirits of the north again, that they may consent to our revenging ourselves upon the white man for the killing of Zampa?"

"The spirits will not grant your wish, for the New Zealander was not of our race. He is not of our blood, therefore the custom of shedding blood for blood which, as you say of a truth, is the custom of our tribe, is not demanded in this case," answered the caman.

"Be it as you say. We know you are a man of wisdom and the interpreter of the will of the spirits," said the native.

He turned away, and taking up the dead body of the New Zealander, his companions were about to follow him, when suddenly the kamaka, or chief of the tribe, appeared.

"Ha! ho!" he exclaimed. "Who has dared to take the life of my guest—my friend? Speak! Know you not that the person of your kamaka's guest is sacred while he is within our village, unless he be guilty of wrong, which must be determined by the decision of a council?"

"The dog of the white man killed Zampa," said the spokesman of the natives.

"Zampa said the white man was stealing away the girl that is to be his wife, and when he went to take her back the dog sprang upon him and tore his throat open before we could beat him off."

"So ho! Where is the white gal now?"

"In the sleigh."

"Bring her to me."

"We dare not. The caman says we must not harm the white men, and they will shoot us if we go to bring the girl to you. The white man has a gun."

"How is this, Soutuchis? Say you the white men are sacred?" demanded the kamaka of the sorcerer.

"Aye, great as you are, oh chief, the spirits are greater, and they have whispered in the ears of the caman of the Tchouktchis."

"Do the spirits protect them?"

"The spirits of the north are their guardians, and they have said they shall go forth from our village unharmed."

"The commands of the spirits shall be obeyed, but the white men cannot take the white girl from the village of the Tchouktchis. The white girl belonged to Zampa, and he sold her to me. Now, I shall keep her and make her my wife," said the kamaka, determinedly.

The cunning old rascal had looked longingly upon Mazie ever since Zampa brought her to the village, and he had secretly determined to get her away from Zampa in some way and make her his own wife, long ago. Now, in the death of Zampa, he saw the opportunity he wanted, to claim the white prisoner. The New Zealander was forever silenced, and no one would dare dispute his word.

All of this conversation had been carried on between the natives in their own language and, of course, not a word of it was understood by Perkins or the Russian.

The American had been growing impatient for some time, and now his impatience reached a climax.

Turning to the Russian, he said:

"Spring into the sleigh and start the dogs. I am going to make a dash to get out of this."

"All right, general," answered the Russian, making use of an expression which he had caught from Perkins.

Then suddenly he left fly his long whip and, with a shout, away dashed the dogs.

Perkins was in the rear of the sleigh and, with his rifle still presented at the surprised natives, he shouted back:

"Good-by! We'll see you later!"

The Russian lashed the dogs to the top of their speed, and the village of the natives was soon left behind. They almost at once entered a broken country, which shut out a view of the rear.

Perkins did not flatter himself that no pursuit would be instituted.

After a time, as the sleigh was passing between two hillocks formed of ice and drifted snow, and as the dogs were jogging along at what was really in this case "a dog trot," the canine team suddenly began to bark and, coming to an abrupt halt, they attempted to whirl around.

The whip of the Russian fell upon them rapidly and they were restrained from turning about.

A moment later the cause of the strange conduct of the dogs became apparent.

The Russian uttered an exclamation of fear.

Mazie gave vent to a simultaneous cry of terror.

Perkins uttered the single word: "Thunder!"

There was good cause for all of this sudden excitement, for at that moment an enormous polar bear appeared directly in the pathway before the dog team.

The American had read of the terrible nature of the polar bear when driven by famine to attack men, and he sprang to the front of the sleigh just as the bear advanced upon the dogs.

Even the whip of the Russian could not now prevent the terrified dogs from whirling around upon the side of the sleigh, between the hillock and the vehicle.

"Give me your place for a moment and I'll see if I can't send a bullet through his brain," cried Perkins.

The Russian stepped aside and Perkins placed one knee upon the front seat of the sleigh and, half kneeling, he took aim at the bear.

An instant and the American fired.

At the same time the dogs jerked violently and, moving the sleigh, they caused the bullet to diverge, and instead of striking the bear in the eye, at which organ the American had timed, the bullet impinged upon the side of the beast's skull just above the ear, cutting the skin and grazing the bone.

The wound rendered the bear literally furious.

With a terrible roar of rage, he rushed forward. Mazie shrieked in terror.

The Russian drew a hunting-knife and sprang forward to the American's side.

Perkins clubbed his discharged gun.

The bear was almost upon him when he brought it down upon the brute's head.

The bear heeded not the blow.

He leaped upon the American.

At the same moment there came a chorus of fierce yells from the rear. The Tchouktchis were rushing upon them.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A VOICE FROM THE WALL.

The gendarme who had raised his rifle to fire at the boy-slave, Morva Kalatka, as narrated, never discharged the weapon.

Just at the moment that he was about to pull the trigger something entirely unlooked for occurred.

The Vulture King suddenly bounded to his feet and, snatching the carbine from the other gendarme, whose side he reached with a few desperate leaps, he fired upon the man who was about to shoot Morva.

The gendarme threw up his hands, the carbine fell undischarged from his nerveless grasp, and, with a yell of mortal agony, he leaped several feet into the air, and then fell heavily, face downward, in the snow.

Morva bounded onward.

The Vulture King rushed after him.

The gendarme whom Kalatka had disarmed now noticed the horsemen of the Tartar party.

He came to a halt.

Drawing a pistol from his belt, which was the only weapon he had remaining, he turned his attention to the two exiles, who yet remained in a sort of dazed stupor beside the log-heap. They had not attempted to escape.

"Now, then, march back to the town!" ordered the gendarme, covering these two trembling wretches, whom years of servitude had robbed of all spirit of resistance.

Silently they obeyed.

The noise of the discharged weapons had, by this time, attracted the attention of the guards at the limits of the town.

A moment later the boom of a cannon was heard.

It was the alarm-gun from the town, which was discharged only when an exile escaped.

The Vulture King looked back, and he saw a throng of dark forms issuing from the town. He knew that a pursuit was about to be instituted.

Kalatka was well aware that Argegoff would again head the pursuit, for he knew the hate of the evil man for him would only end when his life was extinct.

Kalatka was not far behind.

In the town great excitement prevailed.

At the discharge of the alarm-gun, Argegoff threw himself from his couch, and although he was suffering much he ran to the abode of the inspector, and arousing that worthy from a drunken sleep the two rushed to the office.

On the way they met one of the guards who had been on duty at the limits of the town, and he hastily told them all that had occurred.

"Mount every available man, and hunt them down."

"But how came the party outside of the town? I issued no order for any detail to be made to cut the logs," he said.

"Here is the order and pass," and as he spoke the man produced the document which Salus had so cleverly forged.

"Ha!" exclaimed the inspector, as his eyes fell upon it. "I understand it all now. The young viper, Salus Vorviski, whom I took into my office, is at the bottom of all this. The rascal is very clever with the pen, and he has succeeded in imitating my signature. This order is a forgery. The young reprobate shall pay dearly for his work. I'll see that his punishment is such as will deter any other from ever imitating his example."

"That is right. Give the young dog the knout until only a spark of life remains in his body," said Argegoff.

With this the spy of the secret police ran to the stables where the party of pursuit were mounting their horses, and throwing himself into the saddle he was foremost among the pursuers.

The inspector ordered one of his under-officers to return Salus to the mine and keep him there until he returned.

The inspector then joined the party who were starting in pursuit of the boy exile and his father.

Salus was momentarily expecting the denouement which would expose his forgery, and yet while he witnessed the escape of Nivendrof Kalatka, and his young friend, Morva, from the gendarme guard at the log heap, he felt that whatever Fate might have in store for himself he had done a noble deed.

Suddenly the door was dashed open and the guard, whom the inspector had ordered to return Salus to the mine, stalked into the room, closely followed by two drivers from the mine.

"Come, you young traitor, you are to go back to the mine," said the man, advancing and seizing the lad roughly by the arm.

"I am ready to accompany you," said Salus, for resistance was out of the question.

"You will be sorry for your treacherous work, young man, when you are smarting under the knout," said the guard, as Salus was marched out of the office between the two drivers.

The entrance to the shaft was reached.

Down the long ladders he was forced to climb.

The bottom of the mine was reached at last.

The drivers marched him along a narrow passage in the solid rock, which was so low and narrow that only one could pass through it at a time, and then only in a stooping posture.

Finally his conductors halted.

Before him Salus saw a wooden door.

The hinges creaked when the door was swung open, as though they were not often used.

"Nobody has occupied the dungeon since Karl Conidrof, the paricide, was locked up there," commented the driver.

Salus shuddered.

The drivers dragged him forward, and he was pushed into the dungeon.

Then an oil lamp was handed in to him.

Directly the door was closed and locked.

Salus was alone in the dungeon of the mine.

Placing the lamp upon the floor, the youth glanced curiously around the cell.

Salus saw upon every side only the ragged and irregular rocks in which ore had at one time been imbedded.

There seemed to be no opening anywhere, and yet there appeared to be a certain degree of ventilation in the cell. This fact served to assure Salus that there must be some opening by means of which the air circulated through the place.

The lad desired to locate this opening.

Salus picked up a piece of hard, flint-like rock from a mass of debris in one corner of the cell, and with it he struck against the rear wall.

His idea was to detect by sounding if there was in reality an open space beyond it.

The experiment was most gratifying in its results.

The quick ear of the lad soon detected that peculiar hollow sound which tells of an opening beyond a surface which, when struck, gives such a result.

Several times Salus repeated the experiment to assure himself that he was not deceived.

Suddenly, however, the rock fell from Salus' hand, and he started violently.

From beyond the wall there came distinctly to his ears the sound of a human voice!

CHAPTER XXIV.

MORVA OUTWITS THE GYPSY.

The attack of the bear was so sudden that at the moment when the huge beast hurled himself upon the American—after he had discharged his gun at it and struck it upon the head with the stock—Perkins could not evade it.

The American was hurled from the sleigh by the blow which the bear dealt him with his fore-paws, and as he staggered to his feet the enraged beast was about to inclose him in the terrible embrace by which these animals crush the life from out the bodies of their foes, when the Russian, who had sprang forward with his hunting-knife in hand, suddenly plunged the sharp weapon into the body of the animal, killing it instantly.

Then they jumped into the sleigh and started the dogs off at full speed. By this time the Tchouktchis were very close to our friends. But Perkins reached for his gun and fired a shot back at their pursuers. He succeeded in hitting the leader of the party and it demoralized the others, and by the time they recovered from their surprise the fugitives were well ahead of them. In the course of an hour the natives turned back and gave up the pursuit.

The dogs bowled along at a rapid pace.

No incident of noteworthy importance occurred until the neighborhood of the ancient ruin was reached, where he had left Rodent in charge of the other Russian driver.

Our friends had just come in sight of it when they saw a man running towards them, closely pursued by another, while in the rear of the latter came what seemed to be a drove of bears at full speed.

The American soon recognized the foremost runner. He was the Russian whom he had left in charge of Rodent.

The second man was a stranger.

The Russian who was running toward the oncoming sleigh shouted excitedly.

Scarcely comprehending the meaning of this strange scene, the American's team was urged onward till the Russian reached it. The other man was close at hand, but a moment's delay would bring the bears upon the sleigh.

* * * * *

We return to the escape of Morva and his father.

The escape of Morva and his father now seemed to be a certainty.

The gendarme was marching the two exiles, who had been detailed to cut the fuel, back to the town.

Morva was rushing rapidly toward Valmer's party, and Kalatka, the Vulture King, was also running toward them.

It was at this moment that the sleigh occupied by the single person, which had attracted the attention of Valmer, came shooting toward Morva with the speed of an arrow.

The reindeer team seemed to fairly fly over the snow.

It seemed to him that there was something familiar about the person in the sleigh.

A moment later and he recognized the face of Michael Gantsk, the gypsy boy police spy, of the Third Section.

Morva was unarmed.

The gypsy lad had been absent from the mine several days, as the reader has learned from what has been narrated.

The dark-faced youth had been sent to a neighboring station by the inspector upon business of a private nature which is of no moment to our readers.

Michael Gantsk was returning from this mission when he witnessed the exciting occurrences attendant upon the escape of Nivendroff Kalatka and his son Morva.

At this moment it was that he turned his reindeer team and shaped his course so as to intercept Morva before he reached the Tartars.

Morva and his enemy were but a comparatively short distance apart when the former recognized the gypsy.

Morva knew that the gypsy had taken in the situation at a glance.

The moment Michael Gantsk came within hailing distance of Morva, the gypsy cried out:

"Halt! I arrest you, Morva Kalatka. Make one move to run, and I shall shoot you down in your tracks. You know me, and you know I will keep my word."

As he spoke, the spy presented his pistol and took aim at Morva.

At the command of the gypsy, Morva came to a sudden halt.

"You are my evil genius. I am powerless to resist you," he said.

"Take your place in the sleigh," Gantsk commanded.

Morva hesitated, but the sharp click of Gantsk's pistol as he brought the weapon to a full cock warned him that the gypsy was not to be trifled with.

Morva stepped into the sleigh.

"Any attempt to give me the slip will seal your fate. I shall not hesitate to shoot you!" Gantsk said.

With this he grasped the reins in his disengaged hand and urged the reindeer forward.

All this had occupied but a moment's time.

As the Tartars were coming from the rear and Kalatka was approaching from the opposite direction, Michael Gantsk was directly between them. He accordingly shaped the course of the reindeer in a direction almost exactly at an abrupt right angle to that of the Tartars and the Vulture King.

Valmer and his party witnessed Michael Gantsk's capture of the boy exile with feelings of dismay.

The Vulture King saw his son once more fall into the hands of the gypsy, and he gnashed his teeth in impotent rage.

The moment that Valmer witnessed the capture of Morva he had dug his spurs into his horse and exerted every effort to increase the headlong speed of his horse.

The other members of Valmer's party followed the example of their leader.

The Tartars were soon at the side of the Vulture King. Kalatka could not believe the evidence of his eyes.

"Valmer alive!"

It was miraculous.

There was not an instant to be lost in explanations. Valmer and his party tore past Kalatka like an avalanche.

As they passed, Valmer shouted:

"We may save him yet!"

The hoofs of the horses sent up a mass of dry snow, forming a cloud in which they were lost for the time.

Kalatka watched them breathlessly.

The gendarmes were now advancing from the town.

Suddenly the leather thong which answered for a trace between the reindeer and the sleigh in which sat Morva, a prisoner, broke and the sleigh came to a pause. Valmer's Tartars were soon around the sleigh and rescued Morva and captured Gantsk.

Before the Tartars could retreat with their prisoner the gendarmes were upon them. A fierce fight followed, in which Morva finally found himself left alone on the battleground, the Tartars vanishing in the distance, being pursued closely by the gendarmes.

CHAPTER XXV.

SALUS AND VERO.

When the sound of the human voice fell upon the ears of Salus Vofviski, seemingly coming from beyond the rear wall of the underground prison, the lad was terribly startled.

The origin of the voice was a mystery.

"Ha! ha! ha!"

It was a laugh in the same voice.

Salus glanced at the point from which it seemed to proceed.

This time the youth had located it correctly.

"Ha! ha! ha!" rang out the mocking laugh.

Salus saw, protruded through a hole in the rear wall which had escaped his notice, the head of a man.

The face was not one calculated to inspire confidence in a stranger.

"Who are you?" Salus asked.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the man. "Who am I? Don't you know me? Everybody knows me. I know everybody. I am the king of darkness. I am Vero, the king of the mine. Have you never heard of Vero, whom they all fear?" The strange man paused as though expecting an answer.

The youth, since his arrival at the mine, had heard strange stories of Vero, the mad miner, who was secreted somewhere in the mine, and whose hiding-place the most careful search had failed to reveal.

The reader has recognized in Vero the same madman who had rescued Valmer when the latter was about to rush over the abyss into the underground lake.

"I have heard of you, Vero," said Salus.

"Ha! ha! ha! I knew it. Everybody has heard of the great king of darkness."

Salus wondered how the maniac had reached a place beyond the rear wall of his cell.

"You are but a boy—a young boy—and you are very like my own dear boy whom they starved to death in the mines. Why are you shut up here?"

"I am an exile. I am from the City of St. Petersburg, and I was doomed to the mines because I dared to love freedom," answered Salus.

"Aha! you were a Nihilist, I suspect."

"Yes; I belonged to a youthful branch of the order."

"I, too, was a Nihilist, and that is what brought me and my son to the mine. Poor boy, I wish I could help you."

"If I could get through the wall would you help me to find a way out?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll try to reach you."

Salus gathered together pieces of rock and debris and formed of them a heap directly under the opening. Mounting upon this elevation he was able to reach the hole in the rocks.

The mad miner stood ready, and as Salus drew himself through the opening he assisted him to the floor.

The place in which Salus found himself was the same nat-

ural cavern by the shore of the lake which we have described in connection with Valmer's visit to the same place.

"I must close up the hole through which you came," said Vero.

He procured some clay from the bank of the underground lake, and then with it and pieces of rock he walled up the opening securely, and so skilfully that even a close examination would not have detected its existence.

Salus was thankful for his meeting with the madman.

The youth thought that even should it turn out that there was no way out of the mine, as he dared to hope there was, he might remain hidden in this secret place, undiscovered.

It was a peculiarity of the mental disease with which Vero was afflicted that he did not remember recent occurrences.

He did not recollect anything about Valmer, and so it was that he made no mention of his visit.

Vero gave Salus food and drink as he had Valmer.

They were seated by the side of the lake partaking of this refreshment, when Salus suddenly called Vero's attention to a surprising phenomenon, which was at that moment taking place.

"The water in the lake is rising," said Salus.

Vero started to his feet.

Such was the fact. The beach was already covered with water, and it was rising rapidly every moment.

"Come!" cried Vero. "The way out of this cave will soon be overflowed, and it will be impassable."

The madman hurried forward toward a narrow opening near the lakeside.

Salus followed him.

In an instant the maniac leaped back with an exclamation of horror.

"Heavens!" he cried, "the passage is filled with water. All way of escape is cut off. We are lost!"

"What shall we do?" cried Salus.

"Let us return to the cavern," he said, after a moment's hesitation.

They hurried back.

The water now occupied half of its dimensions, and it was still rising with increased velocity.

"We cannot remain here much longer," said Salus.

"No; the waves will soon be upon us," answered Vero.

The waters reached their feet.

"Let us enter the cell," suddenly cried Salus.

"It is our only hope," answered Vero, and as he spoke he seized the pick, and with a few heavy blows he dashed in the wall which he had built across the opening through which Salus had come, and he enlarged it a little.

A moment later and they were within the cell.

"Let us replace the wall across the opening. If the water rises to the roof of the cave it will rush in here and drown us out," said Salus.

They fell to work, and the wall was soon replaced.

Scarcely was this work completed when they heard the sound of footsteps approaching the cell door.

"Heavens, the guards are coming! They shall not capture the king of darkness, though! I will kill them!" shouted the madman.

CHAPTER XXVI.

RODENT ESCAPES AND MEETS HIS DOOM.

A preceding chapter left the American and his companion in their dog-sledge, approaching the ancient ruin, from which the Russian, whom Perkins had left in charge of Rodent, came running toward them. He was followed by a man who was a stranger to our friends, and he was, in turn, pursued by a drove of bears.

The Russian reached the sleigh and, staggering forward, he reeled into the arms of his fellow-jehu, utterly exhausted.

An instant later and the stranger also reached the sleigh of the American.

The man was one of most ludicrous appearance.

Short of stature, with extremely broad shoulders, surmounted by a huge head, covered with bristling red hair, and with short limbs, so dreadfully bowed that they seemed to form a circle, he was, indeed, an odd specimen of humanity.

The bears were close at hand.

The drove numbered six of these savage animals.

"Jump into the sleigh, you two men!" cried Perkins.

The men obeyed him.

"Now, then, let us give the bears a volley from our firearms, and then put our dogs to the top of their speed and, by taking a circuit, we may reach the ruin in advance of them," said Perkins.

Perkins and the Russian now discharged their weapons at the bears. Mazie also fired her pistol at the brutes.

The course of the sleigh was changed and, while Don, the bloodhound, remained in the rear, barking fiercely and now and then making a dash at the bears as they followed after the sleigh, the dogs carried it rapidly toward the ruin.

"How came you to leave the ruin?" asked Perkins of the Russian.

"The bears suddenly came up out of the cellar and drove us from the building," was the answer.

"Is Rodent safe?"

"Yes. I left him locked up in the room where we placed him."

"Who is this man?" indicating the red-headed man.

"Oh, I am a gentleman!"

"What is your name?"

"Herman Hermack; I keep a store in St. Petersburg."

"Whither are you journeying?"

"I wanted to find my way to the mine where exiles are sent. I am off the route, I find. My guide got drunk and I left him behind. I ran on to the old place yonder where I met your friend, and we were just beginning to get acquainted when the bears appeared. We did not wait long then," explained Hermack.

"I presume not," said Perkins, drily.

The American was accustomed to read character, and he had been observing the man who called himself Herman Hermack closely, and he had arrived at the conclusion that the red-headed man was not really what he seemed to be.

They were rapidly nearing the old ruin, and as the dogs had greatly distanced the pursuing bears, the latter had now given up the chase.

The ruin was reached in a few moments, and it was determined to halt there over night.

The American's first move, after finding comfortable quarters for Mazie, was to call the two Russians and the man who gave his name as Herman Hermack, and with their assistance heap a mass of rock upon the trap-door which communicated with the cellar.

Ever since the first day of his confinement in the old fortress Rodent had been working to escape.

Fortunately for the aged villain he had found a way to effect his escape.

An old cold-chisel of ancient manufacture he had found among some debris in one corner of his prison, and he had, by the exertion of perseverance and patience, at last succeeded in loosening several large stones in the wall so that he could remove them and pass out.

He knew from the voices, the sound of which reached his ears through the walls of his prison place, that the man whom he so bitterly hated—Perkins, the American—had returned, and that he had been successful in his quest—that he had found the girl called Mazie.

He knew that a certain scheme which he hoped to accomplish was now impossible, so he had to be satisfied with his opportunity to escape.

But he would have done better if he had remained imprisoned, for, upon getting his freedom, he stole Perkins' dog team and started across the snowy waste for St. Petersburg. But he never got there, for both he and the dogs were attacked by a pack of wolves on the plains and were speedily killed and eaten by those ferocious animals.

* * * * *

Two hours or less after Rodent's flight from the ancient ruin another man left the same building in a clandestine manner.

He was none other than the man who called himself Herman Hermack.

Harnessing to his own sleigh the team which had brought him to the place, he drove off in the direction of the mine where our young exiles had been sent.

Why he should thus steal away in the night, and what he could want at the penal mining town were questions which were not to be easily answered, for the man's conduct was certainly rather mysterious.

Neither the departure of the Russian gypsy nor Hermack aroused Perkins or the two Russians. They were worn and weary, and although the barking of Don partially awakened them, they only thought perhaps he scented the bears which they doubted not were prowling about.

Morning came.

The sun arose in a cloudless sky.

Perkins and the Russians were early astir.

Herman Hermack was missed at once.

Perkins ran to the stable to see if the stranger's team was gone.

The American at once discovered that not only was the stranger's team gone, but that his own team of dogs were missing.

"The rascal has stolen my dogs. I more than half suspected he was an impostor, and now I am sure that I was right. I wonder if it is too late to think of pursuing him," said Perkins.

At that moment the Russian who had been left in charge of Rodent came rushing into the stable with the startling announcement:

"Rodent has escaped!"

"Ha! then I'll venture to say he is the party who has taken the dog-team," said Perkins.

He passed outside, followed by the Russian. A hasty examination of the snow convinced Perkins that his surmise was correct.

The tracks of the dog-team were traced to the southward, a direction which Rodent would naturally take, while the horses' tracks went northward, which was the route which Herman Hermack might be supposed to take if he had really intended to visit the mining station.

Perkins quickly came to the determination to institute no pursuit, for he regarded such a proceeding as positively useless.

Returning to the court, breakfast was prepared.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE PERILS OF THE MINE.

Return we now to follow the fortunes of Salus Vorviski, the devoted youth who had sacrificed so much for his friends in captivity.

We left the young exile in the dungeon of the mine to which he had retreated with Vero, the maniac.

The footsteps of the guards were heard approaching along the passage without the cell, as the reader will remember, and Vero had just sworn never to be captured.

To Salus it was a moment of agitation.

When he had escaped from the cell into the cave of the madman he had fancied that he might be able to effect his escape from the mine itself.

The strange turn which affairs had taken seemed to have thwarted all his plans, and now to hear the guards approaching filled him with feelings of despair.

Salus presumed that they had come to lead him forth to punishment.

The footsteps stopped in front of the cell door.

There was a sound of rattling bolts and bars.

Two of the guards appeared.

The maniac had crouched down close beside the door, and as they looked into the cell the guards failed to discover the presence of the mad exile.

Salus stood against the rear wall directly opposite the door.

One of the guards stalked within the dungeon.

With a snarl like that of an enraged wild beast, Vero bounded upon him.

Guard number two rushed to the assistance of his companion.

The maniac was a giant, but the two guards were also both powerful men.

A combat that was terrible in its desperation now began.

Salus closed the door of the cell that the sounds of the conflict might not attract other guards from the mine to the assistance of their comrades.

The struggle was, from the commencement, in favor of the maniac, who seemed to feel not the blows of his adversaries.

Vero at last dashed one of his assailants against the wall, head first, with such terrific force that the man's skull was crushed like a cockleshell and he fell back upon the floor, stone dead.

At the same moment the other guard, deeming discretion the better part of valor, made a leap for the door.

Salus confronted him and pushed him back.

Vero rushed upon him with a roar like that of a caged lion.

At the same moment there was a terrific crash. The rear wall of the cell was burst in by the pressure of the water.

Not an instant was to be lost.

Salus tore open the cell door and bounded away into the passage.

Vero was swept from his feet, and he released the guard.

The torrent filled the cell and surged along the passage without, carrying everything before it.

The corridor of the mine was a gradual upward grade.

Shouts from the worked portion of the mine informed Salus that the sudden flood in the subterranean lake had been discovered by the miners and that there was probably considerable excitement among them.

Salus was carried forward in advance of Vero and the guard, and he feared that the waves would cast him into the presence of the mine-drivers.

As the passage neared the worked portion of the mine it gradually widened out.

Suddenly Salus found himself in the midst of a whirlpool.

Round and round in this fierce, giddy whirl of water Salus was carried.

He was hurled against jagged rocks and battered and bruised.

The boy slave of Siberia seemed doomed to meet death, then and there.

The fate was a hard one.

Salus felt his senses deserting him, and he realized that he would soon be insensible to all pain.

The boy's suffering ceased.

The insensibility of approaching dissolution occasioned this.

Next came oblivion.

The lad knew no more.

The flood continued to rise in the mine for an hour or more, and then it gradually subsided.

Probably it had been caused by the bursting into the lake of some other underground volume of water, which had originally been separated from it.

When it was possible to do so, an examination of the passage leading to the cell in which the boy slave had been confined was instituted.

"I suppose the young exile, and Barvos and Nedsky, the two guards who went to bring him forth, have been drowned," said the leader of the party of investigation, who was a sort of superintendent of the other drivers and guards employed to direct the toil of the exile miners.

"Undoubtedly they have perished; we can only hope to find their dead bodies," assented the party addressed.

The supposition of the guards proved correct to a certain extent.

The bodies of the two guards and of Vero, the maniac, were found.

The guards at once recognized Vero, the madman.

"The cunning mad murderer will trouble the mine no more. The flood has not been without its good results since it has rid us of the monster," commented one.

"But we have not found the body of the boy exile; surely he must have perished. Let us continue the search," said the leader of the party.

Every portion of the mine which had been submerged was now carefully inspected.

There was no new discovery.

The most minute investigation failed.

The search was abandoned without finding the body of Salus Vorviski.

"The flood must have carried it away into the lake when the waters receded," said the leader of the search.

This seemed to be the only solution of the mystery of the missing body.

Satisfied that this was the fact, the leader of the investigation so reported to his superior.

Opposite the name of Salus Vorviski, in the register of the exiles, was recorded this statement:

"Drowned in the mine."

The date of Salus' disappearance followed.

In the mine there was a furnace and a small engine used for supplying the motive power by which pumps which forced water from some of the wet portions of the mine were worked.

The engineer was an exile miner. He had been for a long time in the mine, and being a skilled engineer and a cunning, diplomatic fellow, he had worked himself into favor with the authorities, and he was granted many favors and privileges not allowed other exiles.

He was the first to visit the flooded portion of the mine when the water swept into it, and as he ventured near the advancing tide a dark body was cast at his feet.

It was the body of Salus Vorviski.

The engineer—whose patronymic was Hector Hersheal, and who was half French, his mother having been a Parisian—recognized the boy, and he at once raised the body in his arms and carried him to his engine-house.

At first Hector Hersheal thought life was extinct, but he resorted to all the best means for restoring the drowned.

For half an hour Hersheal worked faithfully over the boy.

The kind-hearted engineer was almost about to give up in despair, when, to his intense satisfaction, he detected unmistakable signs of returning consciousness.

The engineer redoubled his efforts.

At last consciousness was fully restored.

Some time elapsed before the boy was sufficiently recovered to articulate.

As soon as he could speak he said:

"Hersheal, you have saved my life, worthless though it is, if I am to spend it in this awful place. Still, I thank you."

Salus had met the man and formed his acquaintance the first day of his arrival at the mine.

"My brother, we are both members of the great order of Russian liberty. We are both Nihilists, and I will risk my life freely to assist you. The authorities will think you are drowned. No search will be made for you in the future, and you shall remain concealed here. A way may yet be found to secretly get you out of the mine," said Hersheal.

"A thousand thanks, my noble friend!" said Salus, with feeling.

"See here," and as he spoke Hersheal opened a small, narrow door in the partition at the rear of the engine-room.

Salus saw that a flight of stairs led upward.

"Follow me," Hersheal continued, and he at once ascended the stairs.

Salus followed.

The ascent accomplished, Salus found himself in a small but well-ventilated sleeping-room.

"This is my bedroom, and no one ever comes here. You shall remain here for the present," said Hersheal.

The boy slave of the mine remained in Hersheal's room for three days.

At the expiration of that time Hersheal came to him and said:

"To-night, after the miners quit work for the day, the cinders which are used for paving the roads will be hoisted out of the mine. I gave notice that I had a quantity ready from the furnace.

"A huge bucket is used for hoisting the cinders up the shaft, and as I attend to the loading, I have contrived a false bottom for the bucket, so that you can lay between it and the real bottom. When the last bucketload is hoisted, if you dare undertake it, you will take your place in it and be covered over by the cinders. As the bucket is dumped upon the heap and left there until it is needed again, there is little doubt but you can steal forth and get clear of the town under cover of the darkness."

Salus listened until Hersheal concluded unfolding his project.

When Hersheal paused, he said:

"I will dare anything to escape, my more than friend."

So it was arranged.

Night came, and with the departure of the exile miners from the works the labor of hoisting the cinders from the mine began.

When the last load was about to be shoveled into the receptacle, Salus crouched down in the bottom of the huge bucket, and after placing the false bottom over him upon cleats, which held it securely, Hersheal filled the bucket with cinders, and it was hoisted out of the mine.

Salus' heart beat fast as the bucket neared the surface.

The lad labored under great mental anxiety.

The bucket reached the surface and was swung upon a heap of cinders.

Half overturned, it was left by the tired men, who were eager to discontinue the day's toil.

When all sounds of labor about the mine had ceased, Salus ventured forth from the bucket.

His limbs were cramped, and he had suffered greatly.

Listening, he heard no one near at hand.

The night was but ordinarily dark, stars serving to lessen the gloom.

Salus waited until a late hour, and then he stole silently from the town.

When he reached the guarded limits, he threw himself flat upon his face and crawled along for a long distance.

He thus escaped discovery by the guards.

Upon reaching a point distant several hundred yards from the guards he arose to his feet.

As he assumed the erect position, he ran into the outstretched arms of a man.

"By gracious! you are the very party I want!" cried the man. "I know you! You are Salus Vorviski."

The man who thus seized Salus was Herman Hermack.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

In a preceding paragraph we find that Perkins, Mazie and the two Russian drivers had returned to the ruin after having been chased by the bears. During the night which followed the stranger, Herman Hermack, had disappeared mysteriously. The Rodent had also escaped to meet a terrible fate.

Perkins determined to set out for St. Petersburg as soon as possible. But as Mazie was not feeling well, he put it off for a week, and then set out.

The day of their departure from the ancient fortress was a bright and pleasant one. Perkins accepted this as a good omen, and so it proved, for the long journey across Siberia was made in safety. By easy stages, so as not to weary Mazie beyond her power of endurance, which her weakened stage rendered necessary, they traveled, and when the Russian capital was finally reached Mazie was not only no worse, but indeed very much improved.

Before his departure from America in quest of the American's daughter it had been agreed upon between Mazie's father and Perkins that the former should meet him in St. Petersburg at a certain specified time. It yet lacked one week of the time fixed for the arrival of Mazie's father and, accordingly, Perkins secured quiet and pleasant quarters for Mazie.

Meantime, Mazie had related all that she knew of her past life, and she had not failed to interest the American in the fate of her young lover, Salus Vorviski, one of the boy slaves of Siberia.

Perkins believed with Mazie that her youthful lover had been made the victim of a foul plot, and he promised Mazie that he would lay the matter before General Mellikoff, whose acquaintance he had made, the reader will remember, when he was engaged in working up the case of the Death League. The American, moreover, told Mazie who she really was, and that within a few days he hoped to restore her to her father.

True to his promise, Perkins at once sought an interview with General Mellikoff, the chief of the "Third Section."

The manager of the secret police received the American kindly, and listened patiently to his statement. Perkins went on to say that he believed Salus was innocent of plotting against the Czar; and that if he had joined a Nihilistic league it was only a youthful club, which had no particular political importance. Further, the American stated that he believed that Metternich Argeus, Salus' guardian, had arranged a plot to send Salus to Siberia, that he might gain possession of the property which belonged to the youth; and he asked the chief of the secret police of Russia to permit him to work up the case, and if he found that his suspicions of Metternich Argeus were correct, then he begged that the general would reconsider the case of Salus, and secure his pardon.

When Perkins had concluded, General Mellikoff said:

"My attention has already been called to certain facts regarding the case of Salus Vorviski, and I am more than half convinced that your suspicions regarding Metternich Argeus, the young man's guardian, are correct. A man who was the personal friend of Salus Vorviski's father, but who was absent from St. Petersburg on a secret mission in a foreign country, has recently returned; and upon learning of the misfortune of his old friend's only son, he expressed the same suspicions as yourself, and he began an investigation of the matter. He is one of the most skilful workers I ever had in my department, and I think he will learn the truth. He is even now in Siberia, and I think he has found it necessary to visit Salus Vorviski. If any man can secure Salus Vorviski's pardon, the man of whom I speak can do so. If he satisfies me that the youth has been made the victim of a mercenary plot I will secure his pardon."

With this explanation the general concluded the interview.

A suspicion at once crossed the mind of the American that he had met the man who had gone to Siberia to see Salus, but he said nothing.

* * * * *

The day came at last when Mazie's father arrived in St. Petersburg.

After all the long years of separation the parent and child were reunited.

There was no question whatever as to Mazie's identity.

Perkins, the American, was delighted with his success.

Mazie confided to her father the story of her love for the young boy slave of Siberia, and it was decided that they should remain in St. Petersburg until the result of the efforts made in behalf of Salus became known, for with his fate in

uncertainty Mazie could not leave the land which had so long been her home.

Little did the American detective dream that death alone had prevented Rodent from carrying into execution a cunning plot, of which the death of Mazie was to be the first step.

The plot which death had prevented was one which has been more than once successful.

Rodent knew a young girl in St. Petersburg who bore a striking resemblance to Mazie, and he had determined to produce her as the real Mazie. He depended upon the testimony of the old flower-maker known as Elfontana to prove the false identity.

After the arrival of Mazie's father, the parent and his child visited the old flower-maker, who, although she was mercenary and had kept the child so long from her parent, still felt affection for her.

Mazie could not find it in her heart to chide the old woman who had been kind to her in a rough way.

The father's heart warmed to all who had been kind to his child, and he made the aged gypsy a present of a handsome sum of money.

CHAPTER XXIX.

ARREST OF MICHAEL GANTSK.

"I know you—you are Salus Vorviski."

When these words fell from the lips of the stranger into whose arms Salus had so unexpectedly ran, the youth was more than startled. He naturally supposed that the man was a foe who would attempt to prevent his escape, and he wrenched himself free from his grasp and started to run toward the open plain.

"Stop! stop!" cried the stranger. "I mean you no harm. I am a friend."

"A friend, you say? It is a long time since I have heard that word addressed to me. Who are you?" said Salus, halting.

"As I said, I am your friend."

"Why are you here?"

"To aid you."

"How?"

The stranger approached Salus.

"I knew your father well," he said.

"You did?"

"Yes. My name is Herman Hermack."

"You Herman Hermack? I have often heard my father speak of you. You were indeed his friend."

"I was, and I have journeyed across Siberia to befriend you."

"How so?"

"Metternich Argeus is your guardian?"

"He is."

"Well, then, to come to the point, I believe that man is attempting to defraud you and, moreover, that he was instrumental in securing your exile."

"I have thought so from the first."

"I wish to establish the truth of both of my suspicions, for you know, my young friend, I am working to secure your pardon."

"A thousand thanks."

"I have managed to secure temporary possession of several documents pertaining to your father's estate, and I do not think the signatures are genuine. In fact, to speak plainly, I believe that Metternich Argeus has forged your father's name to a large number of papers by means of which he has obtained your father's possessions."

"Those were my own suspicions."

"Could you swear to your father's signature?"

"I could."

"Then look at this."

The stranger produced a document.

Salus took the paper and examined what purported to be his father's signature, long and closely.

"What say you?" asked Hermack.

"That this is not my father's handwriting. It is a forgery."

"Good! Now look at this."

Hermack produced another paper.

Salus unhesitatingly pronounced it a forgery.

Several more documents met with a like judgment.

"So far, so good," said Hermack; and, after a moment's thought, he continued:

"I am one of Mellikoff's most trusted men, and I am empowered to bring you to St. Petersburg to appear as a witness to establish these cases of forgery. I have with me the neces-

sary papers, but we must return to the mine and visit the office of the commandant, as certain formalities are necessary to enable me to legally return you to St. Petersburg as a witness in the cases against Metternich Argeus."

"I will do so."

Hermack and Salus at once returned to the town, where the appearance of the boy slave of the mine, whom all supposed to have perished in the flooded mine, created not a little surprise. When morning came the formalities of which Herman Hermack had spoken were duly attended to, and the same day saw the young exile and his new-found friend en route for St. Petersburg.

Upon their arrival proceedings were at once instituted against Metternich Argeus and, thanks to Herman Hermack, the faithless guardian was convicted of forgery, and he was obliged to return the bulk of the wealth of which Salus' father had died possessed to the youth.

The attainment of this result was most gratifying to Salus and his friend; but the decree of banishment still remained unrevoked, and Herman Hermack at once set about preparing a petition requesting the pardon of the young Nihilist.

The influence which Herman Hermack, who was really a sort of Russian Vidocq among the detectives of the imperial secret police, enabled him to procure the signature of General Mellikoff; for, although he had himself sentenced Salus to Siberia, as the Czar had empowered him to do, the chief of the Third Section possessed not the power of granting a pardon.

The power of pardon rested only in the Czar.

"Having proven Metternich Argeus to be a forger, and that he had attempted to rob Salus in that way, if I could connect him with Salus' arrest and banishment to Siberia, the presumption would be strong that the evidence against the youth was false, as well as the signatures to the forged documents, and in that case I think it would be no difficult matter to secure the lad's pardon," reflected the friend of Salus'.

Herman Hermack found no difficulty in learning that Michael Gantsk was the spy who had worked up the case against Salus.

It happened that Hermack knew the real character of the gypsy boy spy, and in his own mind he was quite confident that he had been bribed to give false evidence against the youth.

Upon inquiry the Russian detective learned that Michael Gantsk had not yet returned from Siberia.

Salus was under surveillance all the time in St. Petersburg, but as Hermack had made himself personally responsible for the youth he was granted the freedom of the city.

Salus did not dream that Mazie was in St. Petersburg, and the uncertainty in which her fate was shrouded filled him with deepest sorrow. What then was the joy and surprise of the youth when he came face to face with Mazie, who, with her new-found father, was walking upon the Grand Promenade one evening a week after Salus' arrival.

The rapturous meeting of the youthful lovers was the most happy reunion of fond hearts.

* * * * *

Herman Hermack was entering the Palace of Justice one morning when he came face to face with Michel Gantsk.

The gypsy was surprised at meeting the detective, for, although they both worked for the same master, the gypsy instinctively knew that the other read his treacherous nature like an open book, and that he suspected him of certain irregularities in his profession.

"Michael Gantsk," said the detective, "you have but just returned from Siberia, I take it?"

"Yes, and you have recently arrived from foreign lands?"

"You are right. Know you one Salus Vorviski?" demanded Hermack.

Michael Gantsk stammered:

"Yes—I—that is, I do."

"Do you know Metternich Argeus?"

"No."

The gypsy was upon his guard now.

The detective had determined to either bribe or frighten Michael Gantsk into telling the truth, if it were possible to do so.

At this moment, however, came a most surprising interruption.

A couple of gendarmes came up, and one of them placed his hand upon Michael Gantsk's shoulder.

"I arrest you in the name of the Czar!" said the gendarme.

CHAPTER XXX.

CONCLUSION.

At the close of one of the preceding chapters we left Morva alone on the plain after the conflict between the gendarmes and Valmer's Tartars, in which Morva's friends were put to flight, his father with them.

Whether Gantsk had been taken away by the Tartars, a prisoner, or whether he had been rescued by the gendarmes, he knew not.

Morva took a direction he thought to be the easiest way to get away from the convoy camp. After proceeding in this way for about three hours, he came to a clump of trees, in which stood a hut.

Morva took the chance of asking in which direction was the nearest town, and what its name was.

Upon knocking on the door, it was opened by one of the prettiest girls that Morva thought he had ever seen. But when the girl saw he had on the uniform of the mines she put her finger to her lips and whispered the one word: "Danger!"

He asked her the distance to the next town and she told him it was many versts.

He asked the girl her name and she told him it was Valeria Verdikoff.

While they were whispering, around the corner of the house suddenly appeared three men, armed with carbines.

At the same time who should appear at the doorway, with a sneer on his face, but Argegoff.

Morva was indeed trapped.

He was forced to surrender and they bound and gagged him and carried him into an inner room of the house.

Argegoff was jubilant at recapturing Morva so easily and determined to take him back to the mines at once. He, however, made up his mind to stay at the hut until the next day. But that night a courier of the Czar stopped at the hut for shelter for the night and Morva, remembering the paper the dying man had given him in the mines, gained the courier's ear and asked him to open and read it. The courier did so.

The courier seemed amazed at the contents of the paper and instructed Argegoff to remain at the hut with the prisoner until he should hear from headquarters, and to take notice that the prisoner should not be harmed. The courier set off next day after promising Morva to return soon.

Morva was held captive many days and had about lost all hope, when a courier drew rein in front of the hut and, flinging himself from his tired steed, he handed Argegoff an official-looking document bearing upon it the imperial seal of Russia.

The police spy impatiently snatched it from the hand of the courier and hastily tore it open.

The package contained a short note to himself from General Mellikoff.

It was a full pardon of Morva Kalatka.

The contents surprised and also disappointed the police spy, for it robbed him of his revenge.

Not for a moment did Argegoff think of disobeying his superior's command, and stifling his Corsican-like hatred for the time, he re-entered the hut and placed the pardon in Morva's hand.

Morva was stricken dumb with surprise, and for the first time in all his life of peril he felt his brain reel and he grew strangely weak.

Valeria Verdikoff read the joyful tidings with almost as much emotion as the youth himself.

With an exclamation of delight the devoted girl sprang to her lover's side.

During the time that Morva had remained at the hut he and the girl had fallen in love with each other.

Morva informed Argegoff that he intended to go to St. Petersburg, and the spy of the police at once provided him with the necessary passports and an escort.

The youth took an affectionate farewell of his betrothed and promised soon to return and make her his wife.

Morva reached St. Petersburg in safety, and immediately upon his arrival made application for a personal interview with Alexander II.

It is no easy matter to gain an audience with the Czar of Russia, but he consented to see him.

Upon being shown into the presence of the monarch, Morva conducted himself in such an easy yet reverential manner that the Czar was delighted with him.

The lad obtained permission to make known the object which he sought in gaining the ear of his sovereign, and then

it was that the lad made an eloquent plea for the pardon of his father and his friends.

The Czar listened patiently, and when the lad threw himself upon his knees, begging for his father and his friends, the Czar was moved, and he bade the youth arise.

"Your friend, Salus Vorviski, has already been granted a full pardon. I remember that your father served mine well, and in recognition of his past services I will grant your prayer. Rest easy, my lad. Nivendroff Kalatka and Valmer, the Tartar guide, are pardoned."

As Alexander II concluded, Morva threw himself upon his knees and thanked him, again and again, while tears of joy rolled down his cheeks.

With a smile the Czar gave the signal that the interview was over.

For once the iron-hearted ruler had been moved to an act of mercy.

"Could I but rule my subjects by the power of love, how much happier would be my life," thought the Czar, and the expression of settled gloom which habitually rested upon the monarch's face was for the moment lightened by the pleasure which his act of mercy had brought him.

Morva and Salus met the same day.

In due time Nivendroff Kalatka and Valmer, the Tartar guide, came to St. Petersburg and once more all our friends were reunited.

Happiness came as though to atone for what they had all suffered.

In the course of a few weeks Salus and Mazie were married, and Morva was "best man."

It had been decided by Salus that he would go to America with his bride and thereafter make that free land his home.

The glowing description which Perkins gave of life in America so fired Morva with a desire to emigrate that he determined to do so.

The twenty thousand roubles would give him a good start in the world, and he no longer wished to remain in a land where cruelty and injustice had caused him so much suffering.

The departure of Salus and his bride, with her father and Perkins for America was, at Morva's request, delayed for two weeks, while the youth returned to Siberia.

When he rejoined his friends in St. Petersburg, as he did within the time mentioned, he introduced to them his wife, who was Valeria Verdikoff. He had been married in Siberia.

Nivendroff Kalatka was willing to accompany his son to America, and thus it was that Salus and Morva, with their brides, and Kalatka and Mazie's father made a happy party, who all took passage upon the same vessel for America.

In this land of freedom and equality they prospered well.

Valmer, the Tartar, became chief courier to the Czar, and Ivan also gained a position of trust under Valmer.

Michael Gantsk, who was a secret member of the Death League, with Metternich Argeus, were sent to the salt mines of Siberia for life.

Argegoff, the foe of the Kalatkas, insulted Valmer while under the influence of wine in St. Petersburg some months later.

A duel was the result, and Argegoff received a wound from which he never recovered.

Next week's issue will contain "THE CAPTAIN OF NO. 9; OR, THE BOY LOGGERS OF LOON LAKE." By Howard Austin.

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THE STOWAWAY.

By Horace Appleton.

"Hulloa! By the Lord Harry—a stowaway!"

"Oh, sir, please do not hurt me. I am so sick!"

"Come, now, you lubber, get up out of here!"

The mate of the bark Sally Ann held up his lantern, and the little boy staggered to his feet from a pile of canvas among the cargo in the lower hold. He was poorly clad, and was suffering from seasickness, as his white, agonized face plainly indicated. His groans had led to his discovery, after the vessel had been two days out of port, on her way from New York to Liverpool.

"What the deuce are you doing here?" demanded the mate.

"I ran away from home because my father whipped me, and, as I wanted to go to sea, I asked the captain to take me, but he wouldn't, so I came down here," replied the boy faintly.

"Humph!" grunted the mate. "What's your name?"

"Ned Nimble," replied the little fellow, beginning to cry.

"You come aloft on deck," said the mate gruffly, after a moment's thought. "You must come before the captain."

And seizing the boy by the ear, he marched him up the ladder, and on gaining the deck he met the captain and informed him of his finding the boy stowed away in the hold.

"So you want to be a sailor, eh?" roared Captain Potts, gazing ferociously at the trembling youngster. "Well, I can tell you, my hearty, you will find it a sight harder livin' than story-books puts it, d'ye hear? What'll we do with him, Mr. Leech?" he asked his mate. "Toss him overboard?"

"Mast-head him in his shirt-sleeves, and that will teach him a lesson, sir. I suppose he must earn his salt."

"Yes. Here, you, Jackson, send this brat aloft there on the foremast, half-naked, all night, d'ye hear?"

A sailor approached, and seizing the little fellow roughly by the shoulder, he dragged him forward, with an epithet, and bade him go up the shrouds. The boy was weak from sickness and hunger, and terrified at this rough reception, and begged piteously to be left alone.

The sailor picked up a bit of rope from the deck and struck the little fellow a cruel blow. Then, seizing him, he tore off his jacket and vest, and, watched by the captain and the mate, who were laughing at this cruelty, he dragged the boy up to the mast-head. The vessel was rolling and pitching frightfully, and scared the child until he screamed with terror.

And lashing the little fellow fast, the sailor went below.

How lonely, forlorn and dispirited he felt, away up there above the reeling vessel, every lurch of which made him dizzy. The deck was deserted now, save by the watch, who stood forward, and the helmsman aft. The second watch had gone below, and the captain and his mate were in the skipper's cabin playing a game of cards. The boy's attention was presently drawn to the watch on deck, who were

acting strangely. But he soon lost interest in this when the biting wind again asserted itself. He felt in his pocket and drew out a knife, with which he severed the lines holding him against the mast. He realized that if he remained up there much longer he would surely perish, for his limbs already were becoming numb with the intense cold. He trembled, too, when he thought of what the brutal captain might do when they found he had disobeyed them. But he was desperate. He waited a moment to see that he was not observed, and then stole quietly down the shrouds to the deck. The watch at this instant approached him, and he crouched down behind an empty water-cask, trembling with fear.

"I tell yer wot it is, messmates," said one of the sailors, who were a villainous-looking set, "one bold move does it. There's a big pile o' treasure on this 'ere vessel, an' all as we've got ter do is to make ole Potts an' Leech walk the plank, an' it's all our'n. We can then change our course, drive down to the West Indies, an' get rid of the gold, sell the wessel, an' all on us is rich men. Are yer all along o' me?"

"But wot's this 'ere money—this treasure?" asked another.

"Yer knows as we've got a cargo o' bale cotton aboard—leastways that's wot it's manifested. Well, in the center o' each bale is a bag o' gold consigned to the ship-agents in Liverpool. This was all kept secret from us, as it was thought by the owners to be ther safest way o' shipment."

"How did ye larn this?" asked another sailor.

"Ther old man" (captain) "war speakin' to the mate about it yesterday, an' I overheard 'em. Now, are yer all willin'?"

"Aye, aye, Jackson," responded the others, hoarsely.

The mutineers, having arranged their piratical scheme satisfactorily, moved away. Ned, in his place of concealment, overheard them say that as the watch below could not be trusted, their confidence and assistance would not be asked, and they would be locked in the fore-castle while they slept.

Jackson assumed command of the mutineers, and they quietly set about, under his direction, to prepare for their action.

"Ready there, now!" he ordered, "to lower topsails, fore, main and stays."

The men dispersed, going to port and starboard, forward and amidships, and manned the halyard tackles, while one or two swung themselves into the shrouds and went aloft in the rigging.

The sails came down with a flutter, and the vessel forged slowly ahead under but one sail. The work done, all the mutineers went forward with the helmsman, who had joined them, and awaited the coming of the mate on deck.

Ned observed there was a twenty-pound gun on a swivel, all charged, which had been left on the after-deck; but they did not notice it. The poor little fellow crouched there a moment behind the cask, not knowing exactly what to do. Then the idea of informing the captain of the menacing danger crossed his mind, and he glided from behind the cask and stole across the deck to the cabin door, unobserved. He arose from his knees and tried to enter. The door was locked inside! At that instant one of the muti-

neers caught sight of him, and hurriedly approached. The boy knocked frantically at the door.

"Who's thar?" roared the skipper, angrily.

"It's me! Quick—open the door!"

"Thunderation! The boy has come down from the masthead!"

At this juncture the approaching sailor was just reaching out to grasp the boy, when the door was unlocked and flung open. The mutineer drew a pistol and, pointing it at the captain's head, he cried out:

"This way, boys! We are discovered! Surrender, Captain Potts!"

"What does this tomfoolery mean, you blasted swab?" exclaimed the captain, seizing Ned and hurling him into the cabin. "Are you stark crazy? Say!"

"Shut the door and lock it!" panted Ned, unmindful of his bruises and pains. "The men are going to kill you and seize the ship and its cargo of treasure! I heard them!"

"What!" roared the captain, starting and turning pale.

Bang! went the sailor's pistol outside the door, and a bullet went humming by the captain's head and crashed into the bulkhead behind him. Ned sprang to his feet and closed and locked the door before the astounded captain could recover his presence of mind. Leech had risen to his feet from beside the table, on which stood a bottle of brandy they had been freely imbibing while playing cards.

"It appears that the men must have learned of the treasure on board," he said, "and mean to kill us and seize the vessel. We must barricade ourselves in. Have you pistols?"

"Yes. There is a brace in a case on that 'ere table."

The mate opened the rosewood box and drew out two revolvers. Then they proceeded to barricade the door and windows, and meantime Ned detailed what he had done and subsequently overheard while concealed behind the water-cask.

"You said you were hungry," said the captain, abruptly, to Ned, for the lad's bravery had won his gratitude, and awakened in his bosom a remorseful twinge for his brutality. "You will find my a'most untasted supper on the tray in my bunk. Eat it. I swear you deserve a good deal more."

Ned did eat it, and with the avidity that only a half-starved person can show. While so engaged, there sounded a wild shout on deck, the patter of many feet, and an instant later the reports of many pistols. The bullets crashed through the woodwork uncomfortably near, and the three fell flat on their faces. The sailors had found a keg of whiskey, which had been bought and was reserved for their use, when it was deserved; and, having drank considerable of the fiery fluid, they became half-crazed. The mate went to one of the windows, and, taking aim, he fired among the men. There came a yell of agony, which told his shot was not wasted.

"Wait!" interposed the captain; "we will give 'em a surprise. There is a twenty-pound gun on the poop-deck, loaded. If you will climb out that port-hole an' get on deck over the taffrail, Mr. Leech, you can give them a dose of grape."

"Thank you, I'd rather not," said the mate, wryly; "it's

too dangerous. I would be exposed to their fire. Why don't you go?"

The captain was silent. He did not care to risk it.

"If you please, sir," said Ned, timidly, "I'll go."

"What!" exclaimed the captain, incredulously—"you?"

"Yes, sir. I can fire the gun."

There came another volley from the mutineers, and they fell flat on the floor again. An instant later Ned rose, and climbed out of the stern porthole to the deck above. Mr. Leech also went to the window and fired a number of shots at random among the men that sent them scampering forward again with howls of dismay. Ned reached the gun in safety and seized the lark-string. But at the same instant the mutineers saw him, and fired a volley at the brave boy. He uttered a cry and fell to the deck with a keen pain in his side. He had been shot, and his nude body became covered with blood trickling from a wound in his breast.

Then the conspirators rushed forward with a spare yard-arm converted into a battering-ram. One blow sent the cabin door crushing down, but several shots from within the cabin demoralized and sent them back again. Ned was fast losing consciousness as he lay on the after-deck, but he resisted the deadly torpor stealing away his senses; and with a vague knowledge that the salvation of the ship depended on himself, he again groped for the lark-string of the gun. His hand touched it, and he endeavored to rise, but he was so faint and weak he fell back again.

Then with wild shouts the mutineers came on again, and with a last desperate effort Ned raised himself on his elbow and, giving one despairing glance at the demoniacal crew, he pulled the string. He had a faint, dreamy notion of hearing a thunderous report, followed by shouts and curses and groans, and then all became a blank to him, for he had fainted. When the brave little fellow regained consciousness he found himself lying in the captain's bunk, while the gruff and brutal commander sat by his side, gazing at him with tears in his eyes. A joyful look crossed his face when Ned again opened his eyes, and he called in Mr. Leech.

"Lord, now I'm right glad to see you are alive, I swar!" exclaimed Potts. "We thought as ye'd never open yer eyes again on 'arth. Poor little feller, we 'tended yer as keerful as yer own blessed mother'd a-done."

"The ship is safe?"

"Yes. That shot o' your'n did it, youngster," said Potts, wiping his eyes. "It wounded most all o' them, an' me an' Leech here, went out an' captured 'em easily. They are all down in the hold in irons that are alive. It was on'y half o' ther crew. T'other half is all stanch. They were locked in ther fo'c's'le, an' couldn't get out to help us."

The wound in Ned's side was no dangerous and he recovered in course of time. We will not dwell on the long, uneventful voyage.

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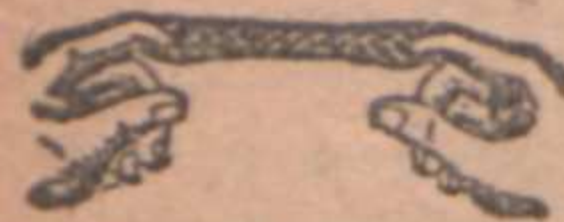


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Price, 10c. each by mail, postpaid.
J. KENNEDY, 303 West 127th St., N. Y.

PIGGY IN A COFFIN.



This is a wicked pig that died at an early age, and here he is in his coffin ready for burial. There will be a great many mourners at his funeral, for this coffin, pretty as it looks, is very tricky, and the man who gets it open will feel real grief. The coffin is made of metal, perfectly shaped and beautifully lacquered. The trick is to open it to see the pig. The man that tries it gets his fingers and feelings hurt, and piggy comes out to grunt at his victims. The tubular end of the coffin, which everyone (in trying to open) presses inward, contains a needle which stabs the victim in his thumb or finger every time. This is the latest and a very "impressive" trick. It can be opened easily by anyone in the secret, and as a neat catch-joke to save yourself from a bore is unsurpassed. Price, 10c.; 3 for 25c., postpaid; one dozen by express, 75c.

WOLFF NOVELTY CO., 29 W. 26th St., N. Y.

MAGIC DIE BLOCK.



A wonderfully deceptive trick! A solid block, two inches square, is made to appear and disappear at pleasure. Borrowing a hat from one of the audience, you place the block on top, sliding a cardboard cover (which may be examined) over it. At the word of command you lift the cover, the block is gone, and the same instant it falls to the floor, through the hat, with a solid thud, or into one of the spectator's hands. You may vary this excellent trick by passing the block through a table and on to the floor beneath, or through the lid of a desk into the drawer, etc. This trick never fails to astonish the spectators, and can be repeated as often as desired.

Price, 35c., postpaid.
J. KENNEDY, 303 West 127th St., N. Y.

BUBBLER.



The greatest invention of the age. The box contains a blow-pipe of neatly enameled metal, and five tablets; also printed directions for playing numerous soap-bubble games, such as Floating Bubbles, Repeaters, Surprise Bubbles, Double Bubbles, The Boxers, Lung Tester, Supported Bubbles, Rolling Bubbles, Smoke Bubbles, Bouncing Bubbles, and many others. Ordinary bubble-blowing, with a pipe and soap water, are not in it with this scientific toy. It produces larger, more beautiful and stronger bubbles than you can get by the ordinary method. The games are intensely interesting, too.

Price, 12c. by mail.
H. F. LANG, 215 Walworth St., B'klyn., N. Y.

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It is strongly made, but simple in construction, so that any one can quickly learn to operate it, and write as rapidly as they would with pen and ink. The letters of the alphabet most frequently used being so grouped as to enable one to write rapidly; the numerals, 1 to 10, and the punctuation marks being together. With this machine you can send letters, address envelopes, make out bills, and do almost any kind of work not requiring a large, expensive machine. With each typewriter we send a tube of ink and full instructions for using the machine. Price complete, \$1.00, by express.

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THE FINGER THROUGH THE HAT.



Having borrowed a hat from your friend, push your finger through the crown of it, and it is seen to move about. Though very amusing to others, the owner of the hat does not see the joke, but thinks it meanness to destroy his hat; yet when it is returned it is perfectly uninjured. Price, 10c. each by mail.

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RAVELLING JOKE.



Yards upon yards of laughs. Don't miss it! Everyone falls for this one. It consists of a nice little bobbin around which is wound a spool of thread. You pin the bobbin under the lapel of your coat, and pull the end of the thread through your button hole, then watch your friends try to pick the piece of thread off your coat. Enough said! Get one! Price, 12c. each, by mail. Postage stamps taken same as money.

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LITTLE GIANT MICROSCOPE.



This powerful little instrument is made of oxidized metal. It stands on two supports made the exact length, to get a sharp, 1-inch focus on the object to be magnified. There is a high-powered lens of imported glass mounted in the circular eye-piece. It can be used to detect impurities in liquids, for examining cloths, or to magnify any object to enormous size. Can be carried in the vest pocket.

Price, 6c. each, postpaid.

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SLICK TRICK PENCIL.



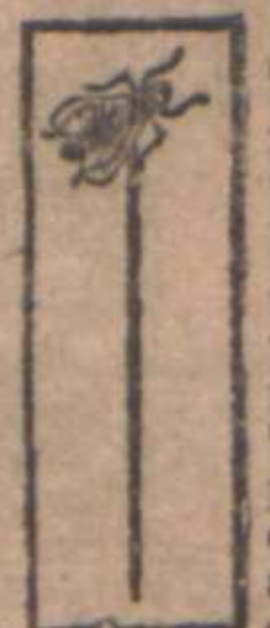
This one is a hummer! It is to all appearances an ordinary, but expensive lead pencil, with nickel trimmings. If your friend wants your pencil for a moment, hand it to him. When he attempts to write with it, the end instantly turns up, and he cannot write a stroke.

Price, 10c., postpaid.

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IMITATION FLIES.



Absolutely true to Nature! A dandy scarf-pin and a rattling good joke. It is impossible to do these pins justice with a description. You have to see them to understand how lifelike they are. When people see them on you they want to brush them off. They wonder "why that fly sticks to you" so persistently. This is the most realistic novelty ever put on the market. It is a distinct ornament for anybody's necktie, and a decided joke on those who try to chase it.

Price, 10c. by mail postpaid.

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One of latest and best novelties on the market. It adds and registers Nickels, Dimes and Quarters put through the same slot. It holds coins to the amount of Ten Dollars, and then opens itself automatically. One lever action does all the work. Other banks only hold one kind of coin, whereas this one takes three kinds. The three coin bank is handsomely finished, is guaranteed mechanically perfect, operates with ease and accuracy, and does not get out of order.

Price, by express, \$1.00

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RUBBER TACKS.



They come six in a box. A wonderful imitation of the real tack. Made of rubber. The box in which they come is the ordinary tack box. This is a great parlor entertainer and you can play a lot of tricks with the tacks. Place them in the palm of your hand, point upward. Then slap the other hand over the tacks and it will seem as if you are committing suicide. Or you can show the tacks and then put them in your mouth and chew them, making believe you have swallowed them. Your friends will think you are a magician. Then, again, you can exhibit the tacks and then quickly push one in your cheek or somebody else's cheek and they will shriek with fear. Absolutely harmless and a very practical and funny joke. Price by mail, 10c. a box of 6 tacks; 3 for 25c.

WOLFF NOVELTY CO., 29 W. 26th St., N. Y.

NEW TEN-CENT FOUNTAIN PEN.

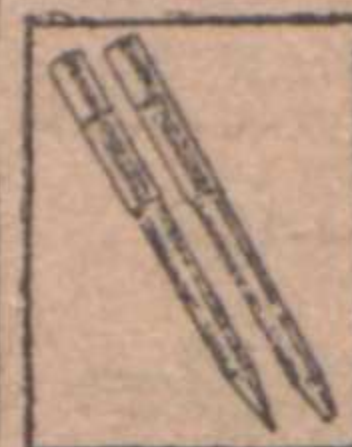


One of the most peculiar and mystifying pens on the market. It requires no ink. All you have to do is to dip it in water, and it will write for an indefinite period. The secret can only be learned by procuring one, and you can make it a source of both pleasure and amusement by claiming to your friends what it can do and then demonstrating the fact. Moreover, it is a good pen, fit for practical use, and will never leak ink into your pocket, as a defective fountain pen might do.

Price, 10c. each by mail.

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SLIDE THE PENCIL.



The pencil that keeps them guessing. Made of wood and lead just like an ordinary pencil, but when your victim starts to write with it—presto! the lead disappears. It is so constructed that the slightest pressure on the paper makes the lead slide into the wood. Very funny and a practical joke.

Price, 10c. by mail, postpaid; 3 for 25c.
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BLACK-EYE JOKE.



New and amusing joker. The victim is told to hold the tube close to his eye so as to exclude all light from the back, and then to remove the tube until pictures appear in the center. In trying to locate the pictures he will receive the finest black-eye you ever saw. We furnish a small box of blackening preparation with each tube, so the joke can be used indefinitely. Those not in the trick will be caught every time. Absolutely harmless. Price by mail 15c. each; 2 for 25c.

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PIN MOUSE.



It is made of cast metal and has the exact color, shape and size of a live mouse. Pinned on your or somebody else's clothes, will have a startling effect upon the spectators. The screaming fun had by this little novelty, especially in the presence of ladies, is more than can be imagined. If a cat happens to be there, there's no other fun to be compared with it.

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WOLFF NOVELTY CO., 29 W. 26th St., N. Y.

TRICK CIGARETTE BOX.



This one is a corker! Get a box right away, if you want to have a barrel of joy. Here's the secret: It looks like an ordinary red box of Turkish cigarettes. But it contains a trigger, under which you place a paper cap. Offer your friend a smoke and he raises the lid of the box. That explodes the cap, and if you are wise you will get out of sight with the box before he gets over thinking he was shot.

Price, 15c., postpaid.
J. KENNEDY, 303 West 127th St., N. Y.

ITCH POWDER.



Gee whiz! What fun you can have with this stuff. Moisten the tip of your finger, tap it on the contents of the box, and a little bit will stick. Then shake hands with your friend, or drop a speck down his back. In a minute he will feel as if he had the seven years' itch. It will make him scratch, roar, squirm and make faces. But it is perfectly harmless, as it is made from the seeds of wild roses. The horrible itch stops in a few minutes, or can be checked immediately by rubbing the spot with a wet cloth. While it is working, you will be apt to laugh your suspender buttons off. The best joke of all. Price 10 cents a box, by mail, postpaid.

WOLFF NOVELTY CO., 29 W. 26th St., N. Y.

PLUCK AND LUCK

NEW YORK, AUGUST 28, 1912.

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BRIEF, BUT POINTED.

A housekeeper, in Queenstown, Ireland, while cleaning a codfish about thirty pounds in weight, discovered inside the fish a purse containing a number of silver coins of the reign of Queen Victoria. The purse was of leather, steel bound, and well preserved. It also contained some inscribed paper, which had been reduced almost to pulp.

George Byrnes, son of the vice-president of the Boston & Maine Railroad, is working in the shops as a mechanic to learn the practical side of railroading. He wears blouse and overalls, puts in the same hours as other employees, and receives no favors. He graduated from Sheffield Scientific School, at Yale, and has taken two years in the Harvard Law School.

The bakers in France are subjected to unusual rules and regulations. In large fortified towns, for instance, they must always have a certain stock on hand in case of war. Not only this, but everywhere they have to deposit a sum of money in the hands of the municipal authorities as a surety of good conduct. The authorities also fix the price at which bread is sold.

Denmark has probably the finest natural outdoor theater in the world. It is situated in the royal deer park, about six miles from Copenhagen, the capital. There the avenues of mighty trees serve as wings and background to a stage fronted by a beech-encircled slope that forms a perfect auditorium. Eight thousand people can be accommodated at each performance.

Certain kinds of mediæval "Venetian glasses" were popularly supposed to fly to pieces if poisoned liquor were poured into them. In contrast, also dating from the bad old days, were glasses which poisoned all who drank from them. The poison was crystallized at the bottom of the glass, from which it was indistinguishable, and as it dissolved very slowly it could be used many times with deadly effect. Some such glasses can be seen at the British Museum, and every collector knows that it is never quite safe to use mediæval glass for drinking purposes without taking precaution.

New York is usually thought of as being directly west from London. It is, however, despite its far more rigorous climate, nine hundred miles nearer the equator than is the British capital. The bleak coast of Labrador is directly west of London. The same line passes the southern part of Hudson Bay and Lake Winnipeg; on the other side of the continent it touches the southern extremity of Alaska and continues through the center of the Isthmus of Kamchatka, and Siberia and Russia, to Homburg. It is astonishing, likewise, to reflect on the fact that Montreal, with its winters of great severity, is three hundred and fifty miles nearer the equator than is London. Montreal, indeed, is on the same degree of latitude as Venice. Another illustration of the unexpectedness in contrasts is found in a comparison of St. John's, Newfoundland, with Paris. Paris has a winter of comparative mildness, while St. John's is a region of bitter cold and fogs, with drifting icebergs along its coast. Yet St. John's is one hundred miles nearer the equator.

OUR COMIC COLUMN.

A certain cottage and its old mistress had improved so greatly in comfort and appearance that a visitor shrewdly surmised that the son of the house, a lazy ne'er-do-well, had turned over a new leaf. He inquired about it. "Yes, sir, my son's in work now," said the smiling old mother. "Takes good money, he does, too. All he has to do is to go twice a day to the circus and put his head in the lion's mouth. The rest of his time he has to face himself."

A Manila mother-in-law had stayed so often with her daughter as to cause a quarrel with the husband, and one day, when she again came to stay, she found her daughter in tears on the doorstep. "I suppose George has left you," she sniffed. "Yes"—sob. "Then there's a woman in the case?" she asked, her eyes lighting up expectantly. "Yes"—sob. "Who is it?" she demanded. "You"—sob. "Gracious!" exclaimed the mother-in-law. "I'm sure I never gave him any encouragement."

A man had just arrived at a Massachusetts summer resort. In the afternoon he was sitting on the veranda when a handsome young woman and her six-year-old son came out. The little fellow at once made friends with the latest arrival. "What is your name?" he asked. Then, when this information had been given, he added, "Are you married?" "I am not married," responded the man with a smile. At this the child paused a moment, and, turning to his mother, said: "What else was it, mamma, you wanted me to ask him?"

"Religion is one thing; an officer's honor is another," were the Czar's last words of reprimand to a regimental surgeon named Kumroff, who, instead of challenging a civilian he had quarreled with, sued him and got judgment for \$100. On hearing the case Nicholas II. sent for the surgeon and asked him why he did not fight a duel instead of going to court. The surgeon said he had religious scruples against dueling. The Czar expressed extreme displeasure and joined the colonel of the regiment in demanding that the surgeon quit the army.



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